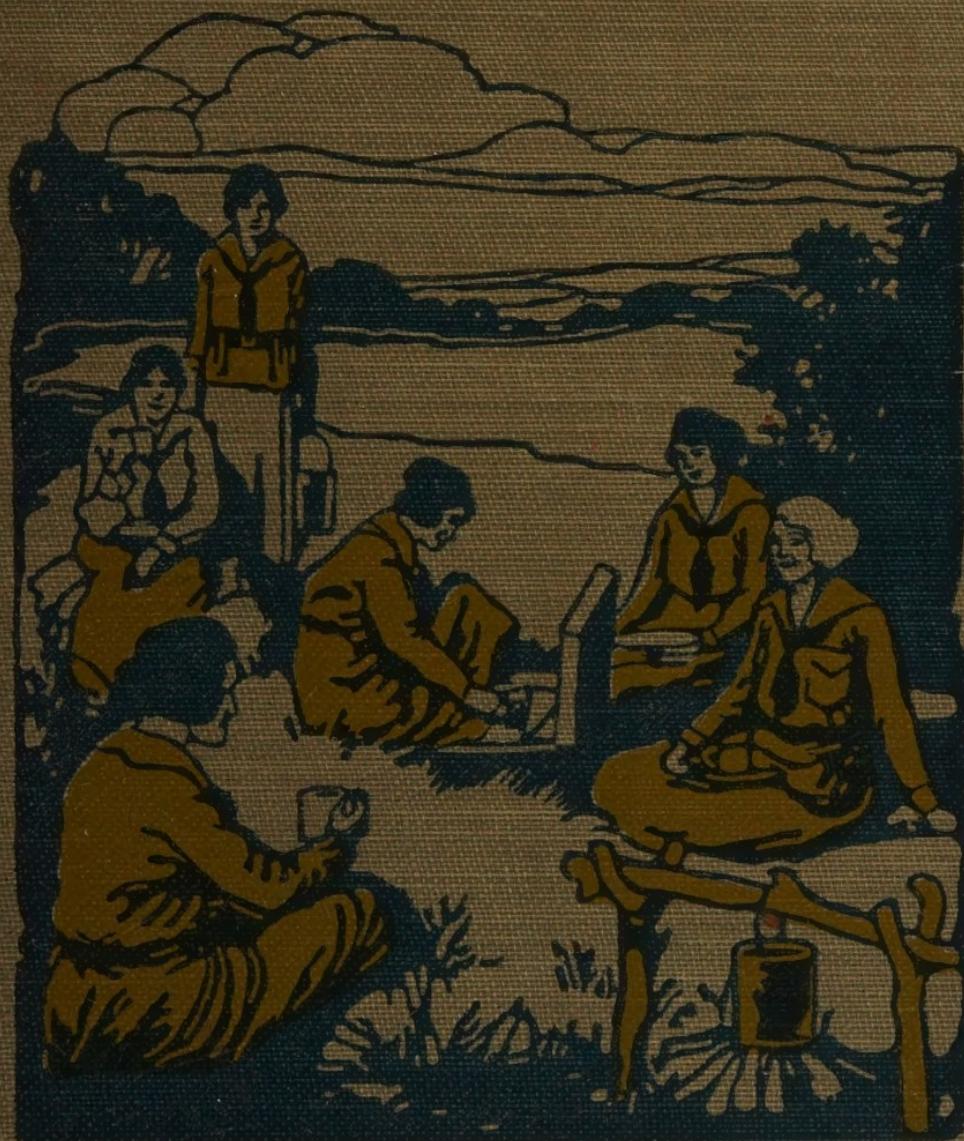


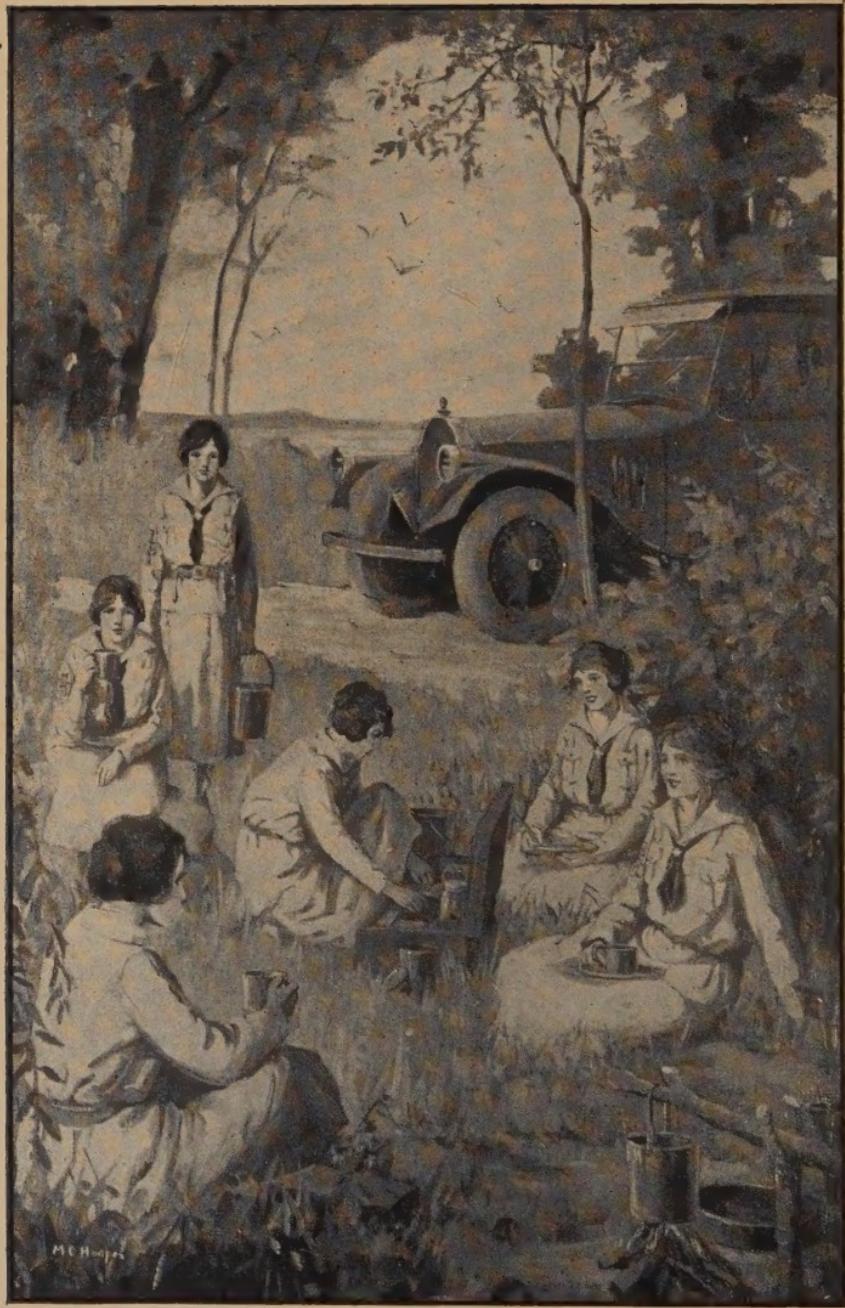
THE GIRL SCOUTS'

MOTOR TRIP



EDITH LAVELL

Merry Christmas
To Hazel
from Clara



"They gathered for the second time around the camp-fire, and smelled the delicious odors arising from bacon and hot coffee."

(Page 52)

(*The Girl Scouts' Motor Trip.*)

THE GIRL SCOUTS' MOTOR TRIP

By EDITH LAVELL

AUTHOR OF

"The Girl Scouts at Miss Allen's School," "The Girl Scouts at Camp," "The Girl Scouts' Good Turn," "The Girl Scouts' Canoe Trip," "The Girl Scouts' Rivals," "The Girl Scouts' Vacation Adventures," "The Girl Scouts on the Ranch."



A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

THE GIRL SCOUTS SERIES

A SERIES OF STORIES FOR GIRL SCOUTS
By EDITH LAVELL

- The Girl Scouts at Miss Allen's School
- The Girl Scouts at Camp
- The Girl Scouts' Good Turn
- The Girl Scouts' Canoe Trip
- The Girl Scouts' Rivals
- The Girl Scouts on the Ranch
- The Girl Scouts' Vacation Adventures
- The Girl Scouts' Motor Trip

Copyright, 1924

By A. L. BURT COMPANY

THE GIRL SCOUTS' MOTOR TRIP

Made in "U. S. A."

THE GIRL SCOUTS' MOTOR TRIP

CHAPTER I.

A CHALLENGE.

MARJORIE WILKINSON and Lily Andrews sauntered down the hall of the dormitory towards their rooms, humming tunes and dragging their hockey sticks along the floor behind them. They were enjoying a particularly jubilant mood, for their team had just been victorious; the sophomores of Turner College had succeeded in defeating the juniors in a closely contested game of hockey. And Marjorie and Lily both played on the team.

As they paused at the door of their sitting-room, Florence Evans, a member of the old senior patrol of Pansy Troop of Girls Scouts, and now a freshman at college, came out to meet them. She had run in for news of the game, and finding the girls away, had decided to await their return.

"Who won?" she demanded, without any ceremony.

"We did!" announced Lily, triumphantly. "Naturally—with such a captain!" She nodded proudly towards Marjorie.

"Congratulations!" cried Florence, seizing both girls by the hands and leading them back to the room. "Now—tell me all about it!"

Marjorie had scarcely begun her account of the thrilling match when she was interrupted by the abrupt entrance of Alice Endicott, another freshman who had been a Girl Scout of the same troop, looking as if she carried the most startling news in the world. Naturally vivacious, her cheeks glowed and her eyes shone with even greater brilliancy than usual. The girls stopped talking instantly, aware that her excitement was not due to any event so ordinary as a hockey game.

"Girls!" she flung out. "Guess what?"

"What?" they all demanded at once.

Alice waved an open letter before their eyes.

"The most magnificent thing has happened—"

"To you?" interrupted Florence, who always wanted to be explicit.

"To us—all of us—of the senior patrol. A plan for this summer!"

"The scouts aren't to get together again, are they?" cried Marjorie, jumping up and going over

towards Alice, as if she wanted at a single glance to learn the contents of that mysterious letter.

"Have you found a baby, or only a boot-legger?" asked Lily, laughingly. "Because it's too late to get our tea-house back again, after the money's all spent!"

"Neither of those things," replied Alice. "Only a rich relation."

"Why the 'only'?" inquired Florence. "I think that's almost enough. But tell us about it. How does it concern us?"

"Just wait till you hear!" laughed Alice, turning to her letter again.

"Well, do let us hear!" begged Lily, impatiently. "We're waiting."

Alice seated herself upon the couch and paused a moment before she started upon her explanation, as if to make the situation more dramatic. At last she began.

"Of course you know our family are all in modest circumstances, but it seems that there is this one wealthy relative—an elderly, maiden aunt on my father's side. I have never seen her, because she has lived in California during all of my life, but naturally I had heard of her before. She never took any interest in us, however, and always said she was going to leave all of her money to her two nephews whom she is raising.

"Well, I hardly thought she knew of my existence, when suddenly, out of a clear sky, I got this letter from her with its thrilling proposition. She must have learned somewhere of the work we did last summer, and of our reason for doing it, and she was impressed. She evidently never knew any Girl Scouts before, or in fact any girls who were interested in anything so worth while as a sick mother or a tea-house. So, lo and behold, she writes to me and tells me she wants to make my acquaintance—and not only mine, but that of the whole patrol!"

"But we can't go out west, Alice!" interrupted Marjorie, jumping at her meaning. "We couldn't possibly afford it."

"No," added Florence, "I was thinking of looking for a job for the summer."

"Wait till you hear the rest of it!" said Alice. "We won't need any money. Aunt Emeline is offering to pay all our expenses, *if we motor to California!*"

"Motor!" repeated Marjorie. "We girls? By ourselves—?"

"No; we may, in fact, we *must* have a chaperone."

"It would be a wonderful thing to do!" exclaimed Florence, contrasting the pleasures of such a delightful excursion with the routine duties of an office position, such as she had planned for herself. "But is it possible?"

"Why not?" demanded Alice. "Lots of girls have done it before—I've even read accounts of their trips in the magazines, telling all about what to take, and how much it costs."

"But they are always older girls than we are!" objected Lily.

"Girl Scouts can do anything any other girls can do!" asserted Marjorie with pride. "I'm sure we could make the trip. Now, tell me again, please, Alice: just which of us are invited?"

"All the girls who took part in last summer's work at the tea-house," replied Alice. "That means us four, Daisy Gravers, Ethel Todd, Marie Louise Harris—and—Doris and Mae if they want to."

"'If they want to' is good!" laughed Marjorie. "Imagine those two brides leaving their husbands for a two months' trip!"

"Of course you could hardly expect Mae to," admitted Alice; "she's quite too recent a bride. But Doris will have been married a year."

"But she and Roger are just as spoony as ever!" interrupted Lily. "No, I'm afraid we can't count on them. But the other three girls probably will."

"To continue," said Alice: "you know that I told you my aunt is queer—a little 'off' we always considered her. Well, she goes on to add that we must make the trip inside of six weeks, follow the Lincoln Highway, not spend more than a certain sum of

money she is depositing in my name, and—the last is worst of all—”

“What?” demanded two or three of the scouts at once.

“We are not to accept help of any men along the way!”

The girls all burst out laughing immediately at the absurdity of such a suggestion. Yet there was not one among them who doubted that she could fulfill the conditions.

“And what happens if we do take assistance?” asked Florence, when the merriment had subsided. “Do we have to pay for our own trip?”

“No, but the guilty girls have to go home,” replied Alice.

“Can’t you just see us dropping one by one ‘by the wayside,’ ” remarked Lily. “because we accept masculine chivalry. Really, it will be hard—”

“Oh, we can do it!” said Marjorie, with her usual assurance. She put down her hockey stick and went over to the tea-table to make tea. The subject was too interesting to allow her guests to depart.

“Tell us more,” urged Florence.

“The best is yet to come,” said Alice, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, because of the further revelation she was about to make. “There is a reward at the end!”

"A reward!" repeated Marjorie. "As if the trip itself weren't enough—"

"Yes, this is the marvellous part. If we fulfill all the conditions, and reach Aunt Emeline's house by midnight of August first, each girl is to receive a brand new runabout, for her very own!"

"What? What?" demanded all the girls at the same time, unable to believe their ears.

"Shall we accept the offer?" continued Alice.

"Shall we?" cried Florence. "As if there were any doubt! She jumped up and gave Alice an ecstatic little squeeze.

The other girls were just as enthusiastic, and they discussed the affair from every angle, while they drank Marjorie's tea and nibbled at some nabiscoes which Lily produced from her cake box. When they came to the selection of a chaperone, they were all unanimous in their desire to have Mrs. Remington.

"But would she leave her husband for such a long time?" asked Lily, doubtfully.

"It wouldn't be a question of leaving him," answered Marjorie. "Because he has to go to some sort of Boy Scout camp this summer for the months of July and August—she told me about it in her last letter. So she might be very glad of the invitation."

"Then that settles that," said Alice. "Marj, will you write immediately?"

"I certainly will, and I'll write home for permission for myself at the same time."

"Marj!" exclaimed Lily, suddenly. "What about the Hadleys? Didn't you promise that you'd go to the seashore—?"

Marjorie blushed, remembering the time she had told John Hadley that she would spend her vacation with him and his mother, and had disappointed him to go on the ranch. Luckily, however, no definite plans had been agreed upon as yet for this summer.

"No, thank goodness I didn't promise," she replied. "But," she added teasingly, "how can you ever exist all that time without seeing Dick Roberts?"

Her room-mate only laughed good naturedly at the thrust; she was used to being taunted about the frequency of this young man's visits.

"I can get along very well without any young man," she replied, boastfully. "I'm not Doris—or Mae Van Horn!"

"Mae Melville, you mean," corrected Alice, for they all had difficulty in calling the girl by her new name, of which she had been in possession only a month. "Wasn't it funny," she added, "that Mae caught Doris's bouquet at the wedding, and sure enough was the first to get married! Just as if

there were something to the old superstition after all!"

"It was, and it wasn't, odd," reasoned Marjorie; "because after all it was very natural for Doris and Mae to be the first girls married from our patrol. They didn't have so much to keep them occupied as we college girls have—and they had more time to think about such things."

"Implying," remarked Florence, "that if you weren't busy here, you'd be marrying John Hadley, and Lily, Dick Roberts, and—"

"That will do, Flos!" remonstrated Marjorie. "You don't have to apply every generalization personally. But, seriously, it is a fact that college girls usually marry later in life than those who just stay at home like Doris."

"But Mae didn't stay home! She had a job."

"Now don't let's have an argument on a college girl's chances versus those of a business woman!" protested Lily. "And by the way, wasn't it too bad that we couldn't any of us be at Mae's wedding to see who would catch the bride's bouquet! We won't know who will be the next victim!"

"Maybe we'll all be old maids," laughed Marjorie. "At any rate, I don't think any of us will be running off soon, since we're all six in college. And that reminds me, haven't we four been mean to go on talk-

ing about this marvellous proposition, and not make any attempt to go get Daisy—”

“I’ll go for her this instant!” volunteered Alice, jumping immediately to her feet. “It is a shame—”

She was off in a moment, skipping down the hall like a happy child.

It was not long before she returned with Daisy Gravers, another Girl Scout of the patrol, and the subject was discussed all over again with a thoroughness that omitted no details. The girls’ only regret was that Ethel Todd, a junior at Bryn Mawr, could not be present to hear all about it.

“I’ll write to her,” said Alice. “Then, if we can all six go—and Mrs. Remington—”

“And maybe Marie Louise,” put in Daisy.

“We’ll need several cars,” concluded Lily, who always did things sumptuously.

“Two ought to be enough,” said Florence. “But say, girls, why couldn’t we leave our planning until Doris’s house-party? Then we’ll all be together, and will know definitely whether or not we can go.”

“But the boys will be such an interruption!” sighed Lily. “You can’t get a thing done with them around.”

“Oh, we’ll shut them out of our conferences,” announced Marjorie, coolly. “We must accustom our-

selves to getting along without the opposite sex if we are to make a success of our trip."

"And yet it is a pity," remarked Alice, "after all they did for us last summer at the tea-house!"

"Yes, maybe if it weren't for them we wouldn't have become famous and received this scrumptious invitation," surmised Daisy.

"What I can't understand," mused Florence, who had been carefully considering every aspect of the offer, "is why your aunt should want us to make the trip independent of all masculine assistance. Especially when, as you say, Alice, she shows such preference for her two nephews."

"Oh, it's just an idea of hers—a notion that she's taken, I suppose," replied Alice. "When you're awfully rich and awfully old, you sometimes do crazy things just for the novelty of it."

"My, what a philosopher you are!" joked Florence. "You sound as if you had been both old and rich!"

"My theory," put in Marjorie, "is that it has something to do with the nephews. She has probably boasted of our work last summer, and perhaps the boys belittled it. So I think this might be a kind of wager."

"That sounds plausible!" exclaimed Lily. "Well, let's do all in our power to make the old lady win."

"And yet," interposed Florence, "she may be on the other side, hoping we don't live up to the conditions. It would certainly be cheaper for her if we fell down—"

"Girls, I think you're all wrong," said Daisy. "I think she is just a lovely old lady, who has read about our work, and wants to reward us. But she thinks we'll appreciate our cars more if we earn them, and that's the reason she put on all these conditions."

"Come, we're not getting anywhere!" interrupted Florence, "and the time's passing." A glance at her watch assured her that the supper hour was imminent.

"Meet here day after tomorrow," suggested Marjorie, as the girls rose to take their leave; "and try to have your parents' permission by then."

"We'll have it!" cried two or three of the girls. "We wouldn't miss this chance for the world!"

CHAPTER II.

TOGETHER AGAIN.

Two weeks after Alice Endicott had received her startling invitation to visit her aunt at the latter's expense, Doris Harris sat in the living-room of her cozy little Philadelphia house, awaiting the arrival of all the girls concerned. The party was to be a week-end one, half of the girls staying at her house, and half at the home of her sister-in-law, Marie Louise Harris, with whom they had lived during the preceding summer while conducting the tea-room.

Doris looked about the attractively furnished room, with its shining white paint and snowy curtains, its delft blue hangings and upholstery, and smiled contentedly to herself. It would have been pleasant, she thought, to go to college, along with the majority of the girls of the senior patrol; but it could not have been nearly so wonderful as to be married to the best man in the world, and to possess such a dear little home of her own. And, after all,

there would always be occasions like this when she could manage to be with the girls again.

She heard a light step on the porch but she did not put down her fancy work to go to the door, for she recognized it as belonging to her sister-in-law. The girls were so intimate that neither considered stopping to ring the bell at the other's home. A moment later Marie Louise opened the door.

"Anybody here yet?" she asked, crossing the room to give Doris her customary kiss.

"No, not yet," replied her hostess. "I sort of expect that the five girls from Turner College will come together. But Ethel Todd will come by herself."

Marie Louise disappeared into the dining-room for a minute and returned carrying a vase of roses, which she had arranged most artistically in a wide blue china bowl. She set it down upon the table, hardly listening to Doris's thanks for the flowers, so eager was she to talk of the latest development.

"Tell me more about this new idea—is it Alice's or Marjorie's?—I haven't got the gist of it yet. Ethel Todd called me up on the telephone, but the connection was so poor—"

"I really don't know myself," replied Doris; "except that it is a trip of some sort, and Alice's aunt is paying the expenses. None of the girls wrote to

me in detail, because they all assumed that I couldn't go."

"Well, you wouldn't, would you?"

"No, of course not," replied Doris, laughingly. "I'd be too homesick. But how about you, Marie Louise?"

"Unfortunately I've arranged to go on studying all summer. You know I spoke of some such plan —well, I had already made my arrangements before Ethel called me up. But I am crazy to see the girls and hear all about it.

She seated herself upon the wide window-sill so that she might catch the first sight of her friends when they arrived. But she did not have long to wait; in less than ten minutes Ethel Todd put in an appearance. Both girls jumped up joyfully and hurried to the door.

"Aren't the others here yet?" asked Ethel, as soon as the greetings had subsided.

"No, not yet," replied Doris. "But they won't be long and they're all coming together. Now—come on upstairs, Ethel, and put your hat and coat away, for I want you to stay here. You know," she explained laughingly, "I have only room enough to put up three of the girls, so three will have to stay at Marie Louise's."

She led the way up the mahogany and white staircase to the dainty little guest room at the rear of

the second story, a boudoir such as any girl would love, furnished in cream-colored painted furniture, with pink floral decorations and pink and cream curtains at the windows. Ethel admired it profusely.

"And did you work that bed-spread yourself?" she asked, examining closely the applique work in a flower design, upon unbleached muslin. "It's simply too pretty to sleep on."

"Oh, it will wash!" laughed Doris. "Yes, I did make it myself. I love to do fancy-work." Then, in the same breath, "Now tell us all about the trip. I'm tremendously interested."

"I'm afraid I don't know a whole lot myself—just the bare facts that you know. But wait till Marj and Alice get here—they'll tell us everything. By the way, is everybody coming?"

"Everybody but Mae," replied Doris. "You could hardly expect so recent a bride. In fact," she added, "I didn't even invite her. I knew it would be of no use."

"And she's too far away—way out there in Ohio," said Ethel. "I'm afraid we won't see much of her any more."

They descended the staircase just in time to see, through the glass door, a taxi stop in front of the house. A moment later five merry, laughing girls jumped out of the machine and skipped up the porch steps. Marjorie Wilkinson, the last to enter the

house on account of the delay in paying the driver, decided to make up for lost time, and seized Ethel, Doris, and Marie Louise all at once in one inclusive hug.

"We're all here!" she cried, joyfully. "Together now—and together all summer! Isn't it marvelous?"

"Yes, if only Mae were here," said Lily, who never could forget the absent members.

"And if Doris and I could go with you," sighed Marie Louise.

"You can't go?" asked Alice, her face clouding. "Oh, why not, Marie Louise? Are you going to get married too?"

"No, indeed," replied the other girl, laughingly. "But I am keeping on at art school this summer."

"What a shame!" cried several of the others at once. They were all genuinely fond of this girl who was the latest addition to their number.

Without even removing their hats, the girls all dropped into chairs in the living-room and continued to talk fast and furiously about their proposed trip. It seemed that all of the college girls were planning to go; and Marjorie's announcement of Mrs. Remington's acceptance added another cause for rejoicing. Their only regret was that their two hostesses and Mae Melville could not go.

"I honestly feel sorry for you married people!"

teased Florence. "To think that you have to miss all the fun—"

"But there are compensations," Doris reminded her. "Maybe we feel sorry for you!"

"Now Doris, we won't stand for that!" retorted Alice. "And anyhow—"

"Anyhow what?" demanded the other, as Alice paused in the middle of her remark.

"Anyhow some of us may have gone over to your side by the time we come back. I expect some of the girls to fall for my cousins—"

But Marjorie put an end to their bantering by a call to the practical.

"That makes seven of us to go," she said, using her fingers for the calculation. "I should think that two machines would really be enough."

"Yes," answered Alice, "because we are to travel light. I forgot to tell you that one of my aunt's stipulations is that we wear our Girl Scout uniforms all the time. We can express our trunks ahead, packed with the clothing we want to wear after we get to California."

"Then everybody will know we're scouts?" asked Florence.

"Yes; you don't mind, do you?"

"I'm proud of it!" replied the other, loyally.

"If you take a big seven passenger car," said Lily,

"wouldn't it be possible to take my Rolls as a second? It really runs wonderfully."

"It would do beautifully," answered Marjorie; and all the others approved her decision.

"Do we camp along the way, or do we expect to stop at inns and hotels?" asked Ethel.

"Both," replied Alice. "You see we have to be a little bit economical because Aunt Emeline is only allowing us a certain amount for our trip; and if we spend any more, even though it is our own money, we forfeit our reward. So we must be rather thrifty."

"I think it's more fun to camp, anyhow," said Marjorie. "Imagine Girl Scouts running to hotels all along the way! Though it will be nice to stop every once in a while and get a real bath!"

"Oh, you'll have to go to a hotel in the big cities," put in Doris, who took as much interest in the affair as if she were going herself.

"The funniest thing is going to be refusing any help from men we happen to meet along the road," remarked Daisy. "I'm afraid some of them may think we're terribly rude."

"And suppose we get in such a tight place we simply can't get out," suggested Ethel. "What are we to do?"

"Walk miles to a garage, or trust to some women tourists to give us a lift," answered Marjorie, firmly.

"Trust us! Girl Scouts don't give up easily."

"But remember," put in Daisy, who was still a little dubious as to the success of the undertaking, "that we always had our own Boy Scouts to help us before. And now we'll be miles away!" she sighed regretfully.

"We wouldn't call on them if they were right behind us!" asserted Marjorie. "Oh, it's going to be great fun—so much more than if we were all wealthy, and could just take the trip as we pleased, without any terms being dictated! It means that we've got one more chance to show what Girl Scouts can do!"

"Well, your aunt certainly must be a queer one to think up all these conditions," observed Doris.

"Oh, she hasn't much to do," said Alice, "except to think about those two nephews who are her heirs. I guess we've given her a new interest."

"What does she look like?" asked Florence.

"I don't know; the only picture we have is one of those old-fashioned things in a family album. She was eighteen then, and looked thirty-eight. You know the kind that I mean. But I have always imagined that she resembled that fake lieutenant those boys we met on the train fixed up for our benefit the summer we went on the ranch."

"Speaking of boys," interrupted Doris, "they will soon be here. And you girls won't even have your

hats off—let alone be dressed. Don't you think we had better adjourn to our rooms, especially the girls who have to go over to Marie Louise's?"

"Right you are, Doris!" exclaimed all of her guests, hastening to carry out her suggestion.

But if Doris thought that the presence of the boys at dinner that evening would put a damper upon the discussion of the project, she was mistaken. The boys, among whom were Jack Wilkinson, John Hadley, and Dick Roberts—all intimate friends of the girls—already knew something of the plans and showed their interest by a succession of questions. John and Dick both looked anything but pleased.

"Why couldn't you do something in Philadelphia?" asked Dick, sulkily. "We had such a bully time last summer!"

"Why don't *you* take a motor trip to the coast?" returned Florence. "Last year we came to you—this year you come with us! Turn about is fair play!"

"Don't suggest it!" protested Alice, alarmed at the very mention of such a thing. "We'd never earn our cars with the boys following in our trail."

"People!" exclaimed Marjorie, suddenly struck by an inspiration. "I know something fine! It has just occurred to me that Mae lives in a town on the Lincoln Highway—the way we will undoubtedly go to the coast. And she has urged us all to visit her

—so couldn't we stop on our way out, and maybe you boys join us for a week end?"

"Where does she live?" asked Jack, doubtfully. He was not sure of being able to get away from the office whenever he desired.

"Lima—in Ohio," replied Doris. "It isn't awfully far."

"But would it be right for a big crowd like this to descend upon her all at once?" inquired Daisy.

"Mae wouldn't mind," Doris hastened to assure her. "You know she has a rather large house—and two servants—for Tom Melville has plenty of this world's goods. In fact, I think she may be a little lonely, and would be overjoyed to see you."

"Then that settles it!" cried Marjorie. "I'll write tomorrow and invite ourselves."

"But how do you know when to set the date for?" asked Florence.

"We'll have to work it all out by mathematics," replied the latter. "There's a lot of planning to be done, and equipment to be bought. We'll have to name a committee."

"I propose you as chairman," said Lily, immediately. "Because you're our lieutenant—and you can pick your own committee."

"I second that motion!" exclaimed Ethel.

Just at this point Marjorie's brother commenced

to chuckle to himself, as if he were enjoying some private joke.

"Tell us, Jack, so we can have some fun," suggested Ethel.

"Oh, it's nothing!" replied Jack. "Only—well, I don't want to be a kill-joy, or anything like that, you know; but I just couldn't help but think how funny it would be if somebody were playing a practical joke on you all."

"What do you mean?" demanded Marjorie.

"Why, suppose you went ahead and made all your plans and bought a lot of things, and then found out in the end that the letter was all a joke—"

"You mean that you don't believe that I have an Aunt Emeline?" interrupted Alice.

"No, not that. With due respect to your aunt, you must admit it's a mighty unusual proposal for her to make to a bunch of girls she never saw, no matter if she is as rich as all get out. The proposition's wild enough, but the idea of her giving each girl a runabout as a reward if she wins through—that's what gets me."

"Anyone rich enough and crazy enough to pay our expenses would be crazy enough to do anything," said Alice.

"And she probably doesn't expect us to win," put in Florence.

"Well, I'd wait till I saw a check for those ex-

penses, if I were you; then, if it turned out to be a joke, you wouldn't be so much out of pocket. That's what I mean!"

"Silly! As if we haven't thought of those things!" exclaimed his sister. "I've been pinching myself every day, expecting to wake up from a dream—until Alice wrote a letter saying we could go, and then received that check by return mail. Thing up some other excuse to keep us home, Jackie; that one won't work."

"You needn't worry about the money, Jack," explained Alice. "It's safely deposited in bank to my account!"

"Well, anyway," Jack replied, "I object to this party's being turned into a business meeting. Let's forget it—and dance!"

"Jack is right," agreed Doris. Then, turning to her husband, "Put on a record, Roger, and let's begin."

The remainder of the evening passed entirely to the boys' satisfaction.

CHAPTER III.

PLANNING THE TRIP.

IF talking about the summer's excursion could have hastened the date of the event, the weeks would have passed in rapid succession, for the Girl Scouts never grew tired of discussing its every aspect. Whenever two or three of them were together the conversation drifted inevitably to this one all important topic; at other times, when lessons were put aside for the evening or a Sunday afternoon offered an opportunity for rest, the five scouts would gather together in Marjorie's sitting-room to talk of their plans. Sometimes they would discuss the country through which they were to motor, and read descriptions from books about the scenery; at other times they would be concerned with the actual problems of the trip; but invariably they would end up with the contemplation of their reward, giving expression to their dreams of owning motor cars of their own. To the poorer girls the idea was too entrancing ever to lose its novelty; Florence and Daisy would talk for hours of the trips they meant to take, the people

they would invite to go riding with them, the pleasure and the service they intended to give. Had it not been for these hours of happy anticipation the time would have seemed to pass slowly; all of the girls—even Marjorie, who was usually too busy to be bored—grew impatient of the months that intervened.

But at last the college term neared its close, and the scouts began to make definite preparations for their excursion. Marjorie selected her committee and planned to buy the equipment in Philadelphia, a week or so before the time to start.

She had commissioned John Hadley to order the other automobile—a seven passenger touring car—and had thereby won an invitation for herself and Alice and Lily (the other two members of her committee) to stay with Mrs. Hadley while they were in Philadelphia. Recalling the pleasure and the convenience of a similar visit the preceding summer, when she was buying equipment for the tea-room, she accepted the invitation gratefully for herself and her companions.

"I'm so glad I'm a member of this committee," remarked Lily as their train pulled into Philadelphia; "so that we will have this week together. For I think it is going to be lots of fun."

"If it's anything like last year it will," returned Marjorie.

"Ah, but remember that we had the boys then to make things lively," observed Alice.

"Well, we have them now. Aren't we staying at John's home—and isn't my brother Jack working right here in Philadelphia—and ready to help us at any minute? And—" Marjorie glanced slyly at Lily—"I dare say Lil might be able to locate Dick Roberts if we needed him!"

"It's time to get our gloves on!" was all the reply her jest drew from Lily. "We're slowing up already."

Five minutes later the girls were seated in John Hadley's Ford, driving through the city to the suburbs where his mother's home was located. Marjorie as usual was in high spirits, but again John experienced that intangible sensation of jealousy because her happiness seemed to be caused rather by her bright expectations than by his mere presence. While she was asking him about the new car, he suddenly sighed audibly; somehow he felt that as long as the Girl Scouts continued to plan these novel undertakings, he would never hold anything but second place in Marjorie's interest. The girl noticed the sigh, and asked him whether she were boring him.

"Of course not!" he declared emphatically. "As if you ever could—"

"Then what is it?" she asked sympathetically.

"Only that I wish that I were a Girl Scout—to merit more of your attention."

Marjorie laughed merrily; she did not believe that the young man was in earnest.

"You didn't answer my question," she persisted.
"Has the car come yet?"

"Yes; it's in our garage."

"Oh, goody! Drive fast then, John. It seems as if I can't wait a minute to see it!"

Obedient to her command he put on all his power, in defiance of the speed laws in the city, and reached home in an incredibly short time for a Ford. Marjorie waited only to pay her respects to Mrs. Hadley; then without even removing her hat, she followed John's machine out to the garage. There she found the new possession, shining and bright and handsome with its fresh paint and polished metal.

"Let's get in and drive it immediately!" she cried. "I think it's the most beautiful car I ever saw!"

"Not the most beautiful," corrected Lily. "At least I wouldn't admit it could compare with my Rolls-Royce—"

"Or my Ford!" put in John, and the girls all laughed.

"It will be great to drive into town every day to

do our shopping," remarked Alice. "Won't we feel grand—?"

"I'm afraid that won't be very satisfactory," said John. "On account of the parking rules. You can't leave a machine alone, you know; you would have to put it into a garage."

"We can easily do that," remarked Alice, airily. "Money is scarcely a consideration with us now!"

"Doesn't that sound fine?" laughed Marjorie. "I guess it's the first time in our lives that we were ever able to say that."

"And probably the last time," added Lily. "Unless some of us marry those rich heirs of your aunt, Alice!"

John glanced up apprehensively at this suggestion.

"What's this about rich heirs?" he asked, with so much concern that all three of the girls burst into laughter.

"You'll probably never see Marjorie again!" teased Alice. "When we meet these two cousins of mine who are destined to inherit all of Aunt Emeline's money, Marj will just fall for them. And of course they'll fall for her!"

"Oh, of course!" said Marjorie, sarcastically.

"Maybe some of us fellows had better take the trip in my tin Lizzie after all," observed John.

"Nothing doing!" protested Marjorie, em-

phatically. "We'd be sure to break our rule not to accept help from men along the way. And then we'd forfeit our trip, and our reward at the end, too."

"Well, I hope you don't have any accidents along the way," said John. "Though I do hate to think of you girls all by yourselves, so far away!"

"Oh, you needn't worry," Alice reassured him. "Don't forget we're not just ordinary girls. We're Girl Scouts!"

By dint of much persuasion, Marjorie was induced to leave the garage and go into the house. Here she found new sources of interest; Mrs. Hadley had collected catalogues of sporting goods and books of advice upon motoring and crossing the country, and had piled them all upon the table in the living-room. The girls literally dived for them as soon as they realized what they were.

"Of course we'll need tents," said Marjorie, turning immediately to the fascinating displays that were shown by the various dealers represented in the catalogues.

"And look at these cunning little folding stoves!" cried Lily, pointing to an illustration that captured her eye.

"Don't forget dishes!" put in Alice. "They ought to be tin or aluminum—"

"You better carry a revolver apiece," cautioned John.

"I don't know about that," remarked his mother. "The books and articles that I have read on the subject say that it is not necessary to carry that sort of protection. There is usually an unfailing courtesy to be found along the road, particularly in the west."

"But we have to go through the east to get to the west," sighed Lily; "and it will be just our luck to encounter all sorts of obstacles—ghosts, or boot-leggers, or bandits—just because we want so desperately to get there safely."

"But that only makes it so much more fun!" returned Marjorie.

"Yes, I know you love danger, Marj. But one day you'll love it too much. Sometimes it seems as if you almost court difficulties."

"Still, we always gain by them in the end!" she replied, triumphantly.

"I'm more concerned about the little troubles—something going wrong with the car, for instance," said Alice. "And I'm so afraid we'll some of us be weak, and accept help, and—"

"And be sent home like bad children!" supplied Marjorie.

"Wouldn't it be funny," observed John, "if you would come home one by one until only Alice was left to return the car to her aunt! I'm afraid that I would just have to laugh!"

"Well, if you did, you never need come around us

again!" snapped Marjorie. "Girl Scouts wouldn't want to see you—"

"Then I promise to shed tears!" interrupted the young man, hastily.

"However, nothing like that is going to happen," said Marjorie, conclusively. "We're going across the continent with flying colors, as all Girl Scouts could, if they had the chance. It's the opportunity of a life-time!"

The girls turned again to their catalogues, and made long lists of articles, stopping every few minutes to discuss flash-lights, spare-tires, khaki breeches, in fact anything that came into their minds or to their notice. Alice's aunt had told them that she would stand the expenditures for the equipment, and they were only afraid that they would buy more than they could comfortably carry.

Nor did this danger grow any less during the next few days when they actually beheld the things themselves in the stores. Alice and Lily both wanted to spend lavishly; it was Marjorie who laid the restraining hand upon them.

At the end of three days their purchasing was completed; there yet remained the more difficult task of mapping out the trip. Authorities seemed generally to recommend the Lincoln Highway as a good route across the continent, so the girls were glad that their benefactor had stipulated this road.

They planned to start from Philadelphia on the fifteenth of June, aiming to reach their destination by the first of August.

"Provided we travelled one hundred miles a day, which really is not a tiring distance, we ought to be able to make the trip in thirty days," Marjorie estimated. "And that will give us fifteen days surplus."

"We can surely afford three days at Mae's," announced Lily. "And perhaps we could visit some other school or college friends along the way."

But Marjorie shook her head decidedly.

"No," she said; "I am willing to visit Mae, but nobody else. We shall need every one of those twelve remaining days. Suppose we have to stop for repairs, or get lost, or are held up by a bad storm—"

"That will do, Calamity Jane!" exclaimed Alice, putting her hand over Marjorie's mouth. "We don't expect any misfortunes at all!"

"No, we don't expect them, but we don't want to lose our cars just because we didn't allow enough time."

"Marj!" exclaimed John, suddenly. "I have it! If you get in trouble, wire for us, and we'll put on skirts! We used that disguise effectively last year —why not now?"

The girl gazed at him mournfully.

"Too bad, John, but it couldn't be done! Unfortunately we'll be on our honor now, and we'd know you were boys. Unless—" she smiled at the idea—"unless you were clever enough to deceive us!"

"Nobody's clever enough to deceive you, Marjorie! Not that I want to, but—"

"Speaking of deception," interrupted Alice, "I have been wondering how my aunt is going to be sure that we do live up to her conditions. She doesn't know us, or anything about our characters."

"Maybe she wrote to college for references," suggested Marjorie. "Or maybe she knows the high standards of all Girl Scouts."

"Let us hope so!" said John. "But perhaps she knows about Alice, and judges you all from her."

"Anyhow," concluded Marjorie, "we'll send her a detailed plan of our trip, so she can check us up if she wants to. Then we'll go ahead, with the motto of 'do or die'!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS CAR.

THE night before the party was to start upon the excursion, the rest of the girls arrived at Mrs. Hadley's. Their hostess had insisted upon entertaining them all at her house, and had prepared a dinner worthy of the occasion. With the exception of her son John, none of the boys was invited until later in the evening.

As soon as the others—including Daisy Gravers, Florence Evans, Ethel Todd, and Mrs. Remington—put in an appearance, Marjorie led them out to examine the new car. Lily's, too, was there, all ready for the journey, in the best of shape, both inside and out.

"It just seems as if nothing could go wrong," said Mrs. Remington, as the party turned back into the house. "The cars are in A Number One condition. Now, how about the drivers?"

"We three have beeen driving all week," replied Alice; "so we're quite experienced by now. And you'll find both cars easy to manage."

"How much equipment have you bought?" continued Mrs. Remington.

Marjorie opened up the rear of the cars where most of the things had been packed in readiness for the morrow, and displayed their purchases, talking enthusiastically on their merits until the dinner bell summoned them into the dining-room. Then she began on the trip, and mapped it out to the new-comers as she and her committee had planned it.

"It certainly sounds wonderful," remarked Florence Evans. "But I wonder how nearly we shall follow your schedule."

"Why shouldn't we?" asked Marjorie. "What do you mean, Flos?"

"Nothing special—only I have a presentment that things aren't going so smoothly as you have planned."

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Alice, lightly. "Don't be pessimistic. Besides we have twelve extra days, not counting the three we expect to spend at Mae's, in case we are delayed by storms and flat tires."

"I dare say we'll need them," concluded Florence, determined to have the last word.

The boys too showed the same spirit of doubt. One and all they announced that they did not believe the scouts could make the trip on scheduled time. Perhaps this was because they hated to admit their

ability to get along without masculine assistance, and perhaps it was because they did not want the girls to go. It was Jack who finally came forth with a suggestion.

"Why not show your good sense, Sis," he began, addressing Marjorie, although he meant his remarks for all the scouts, "and give the thing up! Really, it's wild; you'll tire yourselves all out, and won't win your reward in the end—or anything else for that matter. It was lots more fun to have you running a tea-room, and hunting spooks. Why not do that again, and buy your own cars with the proceeds?"

"But we'd never have the good fortune to find another haunted house," returned Marjorie. "And think how dull it would be without the spooks!"

"Good fortune?" repeated Lily. "Dull without them! Now, Marj, you know it kept us in a constant torment. No, thanks; I for one prefer the calm of a motor trip."

"Wait till you've had your motor trip," said Jack, significantly. "Then maybe you can talk more about the calm of it. From what I hear, it's anything but calm."

"But think of the reward!" Marjorie reminded him.

"You mean meeting those cousins of Alice?" asked John, jealously.

— "Mercy no! I mean the motor-cars we're to get,

and the fun of seeing California, and the chance to be together as Girl Scouts—when we're so nearly grown-up."

"But we're not going to act grown-up this summer," protested Alice. "Except where strangers are concerned. We're just going to be the same Girl Scouts of dear old Pansy Troop—"

"Who don't care about meeting wealthy young men or—" began Dick, but he was stopped by a protest from Marjorie.

"Enough of that!" she commanded. "The time is too short to waste. We must plan our visit to Mae's. Now tell me which of you boys are expecting to go."

As it was a subject in which the boys and girls alike were interested, for they were all hoping to go, they were willing to discuss it as long as the party lasted. Their conversation, however, was cut short; at ten o'clock Mrs. Hadley served light refreshments and informed the boys that they were expected to leave immediately afterward, to allow the girls to get some rest for their early start in the morning.

It seemed indeed a good omen that the following day was bright and clear, and the scouts, true to their resolution, arose early and made their final preparations. They lingered awhile over breakfast, making a hearty meal of it, so that they would be

satisfied at noon with a light luncheon. They kept rehearsing their program for the day, and talking over their schedule as to drivers and stops and mileage. Marjorie reminded Lily to turn her speedometer back to zero, because, as she said, they wanted to be very exact about their trip.

"We must never be willing to turn in at night," she added, "unless we have covered our one hundred miles."

"And yet," put in Lily, "you decided that we wouldn't travel at night! Now how can you make those two rules consistent?"

Marjorie smiled good-naturedly at the other girl's logic, admitting that perhaps she had been a trifle inconsistent.

"It's ten minutes to eight," interrupted Florence; "don't you girls think we had better start?"

"No," replied Marjorie, thoughtfully. "It would never do to start at ten minutes of the hour. Let's leave on the very stroke of eight."

"Then we ought to get our hats on and be all ready—and give Mrs. Hadley her good-bye kisses."

"And don't forget mine!" added John, hopefully.

They were off at last, Marjorie at the wheel of the big car, and Lily in the driver's seat of her own, directing their course through the Park. Here they followed the Wissahickon, past all the spots

where Marjorie had looked so eagerly for a location for the tea-room the year before; and as they saw it in all its natural loveliness more than one girl experienced a passing sensation of homesickness at the thought of leaving so much beauty behind.

But by the time they left the Park at the City Line, and climbed the long steep hill over the river, the joy of travelling, the lure of the open road had taken hold of them, and made them anxious to press on. Both machines took the sharp incline on high, and sped on to the succeeding hills; then, when they came to the church at the cross-roads, where they met the Lincoln Highway, both drivers stopped for a minute.

"Here is the red, white, and blue mark!" cried Marjorie. "The mark that we'll be looking for all the way out to the coast."

"Here's hoping we never miss it!" exclaimed Alice, fervently.

"Shall I continue to lead?" asked Marjorie, turning to Lily.

"Yes, yes, go on," urged the other. "The large car ought to go first."

"That it can see that all is well for the little one!" explained Daisy.

Marjorie released her brakes, and again both cars made a start. They were on a beautiful road now,

shaded by tall trees, and lined with imposing dwellings.

"If it's all like this, the trip will be more than delightful!" exclaimed Alice, as she shifted her gaze from one side of the road to the other, in admiration of the beautiful lawns and lovely houses. "Why, I'd be satisfied with one of the lodge-keepers' houses to live in!"

"Well, I'm afraid it's not all quite so nice as this," replied Marjorie. "You know Pennsylvania is one of the states that is noted for its wonderful scenery."

"That reminds me," said Daisy, "don't we pass through the town where Ethel's college is located?"

"Bryn Mawr? I should say we do. You know the town is called by the same name. It's right after we pass through Haverford—"

"Where the men's college is?" inquired Alice.

"Yes; the Quaker college. We'll keep a watch out for it."

The girls were reducing their speed now in compliance with the fifteen miles an hour regulation enforced in the towns, and they found ample opportunity to look about them. It was no wonder, therefore, as they were just about to enter the most congested part of Haverford, that they noticed a small, bright red racing car flash by them at a prohibitive pace.

"I wonder what their hurry is," remarked Mar-

jorie. "I noticed that car behind us quite a while ago."

"Maybe they are college students," said Alice, "out for a joy ride. They looked young."

"My gracious, Alice, did you even notice their ages," teased Florence. Then, turning to their chaperone, "Mrs. Remington, I see you will have to keep your eye on this young lady during the trip."

"Now, Flos, that isn't fair!" protested the accused. "You know there was something unusual—likely to attract attention—about that car. You girls probably all noticed it, and most of you would look at the young men too, if you got the chance!"

"Guilty!" admitted Marjorie, in self-accusation.

"Well, it serves them right if they get arrested," said Alice. "I only hope they don't have any accidents."

She spoke lightly, and yet she could not dismiss the young men from her mind. They really were very striking looking—almost distinguished—and they had looked at the girls as they passed them. Indeed it seemed to Alice that they had given her in particular an especial amount of attention.

By the time they had been riding for an hour or two longer, and had seen hundreds of machines, Alice had almost forgotten them, and probably would never have thought of them again, except for an incident which occurred while the girls were eat-

ing lunch. They drew up in front of a little tea-room, and were just preparing to get out when Alice caught a glimpse of a bright red car, coming from the opposite direction. She grasped Marjorie's arm.

"Look, Marj! That must be our friends!" she exclaimed.

"What friends?" demanded Marjorie, who had totally forgotten the incident of the morning.

"Why, the young men you people teased me about. Don't you remember?"

The car was in full sight now, and was slowing down in front of the tea-room. It was evident that Alice's surmise was correct.

"They're coming 'in' here to lunch, too!" whispered Marjorie. "I believe you did make a hit, Alice!"

But Alice shook her head.

"No, Marj; I have another idea."

"What?"

"I'll tell you after lunch. Only—watch them!"

"You sound mysterious! What—?"

"Sh! I'll explain later."

The scouts were no sooner seated at two tables by the window than the young men entered with an air of unconcern. Without apparently noticing the girls, they selected a place on the opposite side of the room. While the girls gave their order, and later when they were eating their luncheon, they

ventured now and then a casual glance at their neighbors; but never once did they catch the young men looking at them.

"I wonder which one of you is the attraction," muttered Lily, looking around the party.

"Notice she says 'you' and not 'us'!" remarked Florence. "Of course you consider yourself out of it, Lil! But remember, they don't know you've already found the 'one and only man'."

"Nonsense, Flos! You talk as if I were engaged—and I'm far from it. But I don't think I am the attraction."

"Well, I hope not. And I hope it isn't Marj, either, for they'd be sadly disappointed after they found out about John Hadley."

"Girls," put in Marjorie. "You better be careful about what you say. Let's save our discussion till we get out of here."

In accordance with her wish, Alice let the matter drop until they were on their way again. Then she expounded her theory.

"Girls," she began very solemnly, in a tone loud enough for the other occupants of the large car to hear, "I think I know who our mysterious friends are—and what they are doing!"

"Who? What?" demanded Marjorie and Florence at once.

"Are they boot-leggers?" asked Daisy, with an in-

voluntary shudder at the idea of meeting with trouble again.

"No," replied Alice. "Hasn't anybody guessed it?"

"No! No!" said Marjorie. "Do tell us, Alice!"

"I'll wager Ethel has guessed," said Alice, enjoying their curiosity. "She has such a good detective mind."

"But Marj has too, and she doesn't know what you're talking about, said Florence. "So you might as well take us out of our agony!"

Alice made her statement slowly: "*I think those two young men are my cousins*, sent by my Aunt Emeline to spy on us, and see whether we fulfill all our conditions!"

The girls simply gasped at the novelty of the idea; involuntarily Marjorie slowed the car so that they could talk more easily.

"But why would they make themselves so obvious? she asked. "Spies usually work in secret—"

"No, Aunt Emeline wouldn't stoop to that sort of thing," replied Alice.

"Do you know your cousins names, Alice?" asked Daisy.

"Yes: Milton and Vaughn Crowell."

"Not the same last name as your aunt?"

"No, Aunt Emeline is a Miss Vaughn. The

younger nephew took his mother's maiden name for a first name."

"Have you ever seen their pictures?" asked Florence.

"No, never."

"Then how shall we know whether you are right?"

"We can't know—till we get to California."

"Oh, I simply can't wait all that time," said Marjorie, impatiently. "Let's make a vow that if they pass us once more, we'll lay a trap for them to discover their identity."

"All right. But how?"

"We'll think of something later. Somebody will probably get an inspiration."

"But do wait, girls, and be sure," urged Mrs. Remington. "After all, the chances are small—"

"Only that my aunt knows our exact route—and well—she seems to be that sort of person."

Late that afternoon when their speedometers registered the required hundred miles, and the girls had stopped at an attractive spot for their camp, the bright red car with its two young occupants passed by them twice. But on neither occasion did the young men make any attempt to establish an acquaintanceship.

CHAPTER V.

FLAT TIRES.

WHEN the bright red car passed the girls for the second time since their encampment, they one and all stopped eating to watch it until it was out of sight. Alice Endicott was the first to speak.

"Now do you believe me?" she challenged.

"Believe that they are your cousins, just because we have passed them four times?" asked Marjorie, skeptically.

"*They have passed us,*" corrected the other; "not we them. Doesn't it look to you as if we were being spied on?"

"No, it doesn't," returned Marjorie. "If it isn't coincidence, it is because they admire our looks!"

"But it's too often to be coincidence," persisted Alice.

"No it isn't either! Once Lily and I were going somewhere for luncheon—a place in the country, where we had to inquire our way—and do you know we went back and forth past one miserable little

house four times, just following mistaken direction!"

"And did you finally get there?" inquired Daisy.

"Need you ask?" flashed Lily. "Aren't we Girl Scouts?"

"Well, these young men don't look to me like the sort who get lost," said Alice. "What do you think, Mrs. Remington?"

"I think it's because I am chaperoning an exceedingly attractive party of girls!" replied their leader.

"You flatterer!" laughed Marjorie. "Well, all we can do is wait and see. Probably they'll never turn up again."

"But if Mrs. Remington is right, and they like our looks," reasoned Lily, "they are probably watching for some chance to make our acquaintance, and we'll see them again."

"On the contrary, have you noticed that they haven't made any attempt to talk to us!" Alice reminded them. "Even in the tea-room, . . . However, if they ever do, let's make a violent effort to get hold of their visiting cards, to see whether they are my cousins."

"I'll agree to that," said Marjorie, "if you'll all agree to turn in early. I'm dead, myself!"

The scouts needed no persuading, and as soon as the twilight had faded they made their preparations for the night. Nor did the problem of the young

men in their possible pursuit disturb their dreams; they all slept soundly until the sun came up. Marjorie was the first to awake.

"Me for a swim!" she cried, after she had succeeded in arousing the other girls. "Lil, where did you put my suit?"

"All the way in the bottom of the bag, I'm afraid," came the sleepy reply. "Why not wait till tomorrow, Marj?"

"And there may be no stream near!" returned the other. "No indeed, I'm going into every single fish-pond I can find here in the east, because I understand that we don't come across them so frequently west of the Mississippi."

The argument was conclusive, and, with the exception of Mrs. Remington, who offered to start breakfast, the girls all took advantage of their opportunity and plunged in. They found the water cool and delightful, and, as they swam about, they almost imagined themselves at one of the scout camps again. At first they tried to keep their hair from getting wet, but at last they abandoned the effort in favor of having a really good time—and incidentally washing their hair as well.

"The only thing that bothers me," remarked Ethel, "is that I spent a perfectly good dollar for a shampoo day before yesterday, and here I could have a free one today!"

"Too bad about you!" laughed Florence. "But don't you remember, Ethel, that we are so rich now that we don't need to let mere money cares worry us?"

"Very true—I had forgotten," admitted Ethel. "It's a sort of shock to become fabulously rich over night, isn't it?"

"How about when we become fabulously poor again?" asked Alice. "Won't that be a jolt?"

"I guess we'll survive," observed Marjorie, making her way towards the bank of the stream. Well, girls, I'm through—I want my breakfast! I'm going back to dress, so that I can help Mrs. Remington."

Half an hour later, when they gathered for the second time around the camp-fire, and smelled the delicious odors arising from bacon and hot coffee, they were subtly conscious of the return of that old spirit of comradeship which meant so much to them all. It was so pleasant to be together again—and under such happy circumstances.

"If everything goes as well as it has begun," remarked Lily, "we certainly will have a lovely trip."

"And it's going to go well," said Marjorie with assurance. "There's nothing to worry us, unless it is a little rain. But who cares for that?"

"Nobody!" cried two or three of the girls at once. ,

"Our cars are certainly the pink of perfection," added Lily. "Both of them are in such good condition that nothing short of an accident could make them go wrong."

"And even the tires are brand new, so we needn't expect any punctures," put in Ethel.

"Wouldn't it be funny," chuckled Alice, "if those young men really are spies sent by Aunt Emeline, and if they find that we do everything like clock-work, and have to give her an even better report than we would care to give ourselves!"

"Then let's be starting again," urged Marjorie, rising with a sudden display of energy. "And keep up our good beginning."

They changed shifts now, Florence taking the driver's seat in Lily's roadster, and Ethel assuming command of the larger car. Again the weather was bright and clear, and a smooth road stretched before them. The girls looked forward to another delightful day.

"I wonder whether we shall get tired of riding," remarked Marjorie, who was enjoying the luxury of a seat in the tonneau. "I don't believe I shall, even after three thousand miles."

"I don't believe any of us will if we don't try to rush too much," replied Mrs. Remington. "If we rest on Sundays, and don't attempt to go too far in a day, and stop off at Mae's—"

"Won't that be delightful!" exclaimed Alice. "Aren't you girls all crazy to see her new home? Chauffeur—" She touched Ethel on the shoulder—"drive fast so that we can get there by Saturday."

"There's no danger about that," Marjorie reassured her, consulting her schedule for perhaps the fiftieth time. "We're surer than a railroad—"

"Sh! Marj! Don't boast!" warned Lily. "Don't tempt Providence! I too am wild to see Mae's home."

"It sounds as if it is very gorgeous," said Alice. "Do you suppose she is as happy as Doris?"

"I guess so," replied Lily. "Say, Marj, don't you remember what I said last year about losing one girl by marriage every year? It looks as if my prophecy were coming true, doesn't it?"

"No, I won't admit that," answered Marjorie. "Just because we have had two weddings is no sign we'll have more. The other six of the patrol are all college girls, and, as I remarked before, I don't think that any of us are planning on getting married before we graduate. How about it girls?"

The other two girls in the machine instantly agreed with her, and Marjorie turned triumphantly again to Lily.

"You see, Lil, nobody will oblige you by getting married next year—unless you do it yourself, just to carry out your theory. But I don't think that would

'be fair, after you promised to room with me at college."

"Oh, you needn't worry about me," laughed Lily. "I'm safe."

The loud blowing of a horn behind them attracted their attention and caused Ethel to pull her car sharply over to the right. A second later, to their astonished eyes, the bright red car with its two male occupants went whizzing by.

"There!" cried Alice, excitedly. "Doesn't that prove it?"

But the others were too much amazed to make an attempt to answer the question.

"But why, I wonder," demanded Lily, "should they always insist upon passing us at such a tremendous rate of speed?"

"I know!" exclaimed Alice. "They have to get to the next telegraph office to send Aunt Emeline her report on our progress."

"Well, I'm sorry to spoil your story, Alice," said Marjorie; "but I'm afraid that I don't believe a word of it. These young men are probably boot-leggers—"

"Then we'd better get the boys on their trail, as we did last summer!"

"Oh, girls, let's forget them," said Ethel. "As long as everything goes well, what do we care about

the other travellers along the road? They're not hurting us!"

"No, nothing's going to hurt us!" boasted Marjorie, but hardly were the words out of her mouth than the first unmistakable signal of distress appeared. A dull, ominous knocking in the rear of the car, sounded distinct above the noise of their conversation, and the whir of the machinery. Ethel stopped the automobile immediately, and the girls looked at each other in dismay.

"It's a puncture, I'm sure!" pronounced Lily.
"That old familiar sound—"

"But how could it be with such lovely new tires?" demanded Alice, resentfully.

No one answered her question, for a moment while the girls all jumped out of the car.

"Two punctures!" Ethel flung out. "Both back tires flat!"

"But how—?" insisted Alice, still more incredulously.

"I've found one cause!" announced Marjorie. She held up a large tack, which she had just extracted from the left tire.

"Then there must be one in the right, also," commented Ethel. "Well, girls, let's don't lose any time, for the tires may be stiff—the car's new, you know—and they've never been changed. We'll need every single person to help!"

"If we only had a couple of the boys!" sighed Alice.

"And forfeit our trip, and the cars we are to win?" demanded Marjorie. "Come, cheer up, Alice. It's not such a bad job; you only think so because you have never done it. I'm going to show you how."

But as Ethel had intimated, the task was more difficult than they had anticipated, and nearly an hour went by before it was completed. In that time a good many machines passed them, and a number stopped to offer assistance. But the girls resolutely refused them all.

It was only after the tools were all put away, and the party ready to set off again that Marjorie suddenly realized that the Rolls-Royce, which had continued to travel behind them, had not passed them during the preceding hour.

"What do you suppose could have happened?" she asked.

"Probably, punctures, like us," surmised Ethel. "Tacks, you know."

"But my car's tires are easy to change," objected Lily.

"Not easy for novices," said Mrs. Remington. "Do you think that perhaps we had better turn back?"

"Oh, no," replied Ethel; "we're too liable to run

over the same tacks again. Anyway, the girls have to learn. I'll drive slowly, and probably they will catch up to us."

"If they haven't been kidnapped by the occupants of the red car," observed Alice.

"No," said Marjorie, slowly, straining her eyes in the distance; "because the red car—is—coming towards us now!"

A minute later the mysterious car passed them again, amid a cloud of smoke.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN Florence and Daisy learned that in accordance with Marjorie's system they were to drive together in the smaller car, they both appeared somewhat distressed. For, of the six girls in the party, these two were undoubtedly the most inexperienced.

"Shall we ask Marj to rearrange the plan?" suggested Daisy. "Because if anything should happen—"

"Oh, nothing will happen, I guess!" replied Florence, reassuringly. "Everything so far has been going so smoothly." .

"Yes, and I suppose we might as well learn to rely on ourselves if we want to get any fun out of our own cars when we get them," added her companion.

Nevertheless the girls decided to go slowly, taking every precaution, even though it put them quite far behind the other car. They did not talk much, in order that they might better keep their minds upon

the driving; as novices they took their responsibility seriously.

"I've always heard that beginners grasp the steering wheel too tightly," remarked Florence, after an interval. "Do you notice the air of unconcern I'm putting on?"

"You've been doing very well," Daisy assured her. "We've been going pretty straight."

"Yes,—until now. But I just can't seem to keep away from the gutter. Look, Daisy! It insists on going crooked!"

Her companion regarded attentively the course that the car was taking.

"I believe you're right, Flos," she admitted, reluctantly. "Could anything be wrong with the wheel?"

A troubled expression came over the youthful driver's face, as she made the experiment again. This time she was certain, something assuredly was in need of repair. She pulled up to the side of the road and stopped.

"I haven't an idea what to look for—or where the trouble might be," she said. "But I think we had better investigate."

Both girls got up anxiously, and stepped around in front of the car. A glance informed them immediately of the cause of their distress; the front tire was as flat as a burst balloon.

"A puncture!" exclaimed Daisy, woefully.

"Yes, here is the tack!" cried Florence. "No wonder that the wheel wouldn't go straight!"

They surveyed it for a moment in dismay, wondering whether they would be able to repair it.

"Did you ever fix a puncture, Daisy?" asked Florence, although she was almost sure that the reply would be in the negative.

"Never!" replied the other. "Did you?"

"No, sad to relate!"

"And we don't know where Lily keeps her things—that's the worst of it. Still, I've often seen it done. And, as Marj always says, what other girls can do, Girl Scouts can surely do!"

They began to rummage in the tool box, taking out every sort of tool which they thought might be necessary. Finally Florence found the jack.

"This is the first thing to do!" she cried, holding it up triumphantly. "If we can get it under the car, and make the car rise up in the air, the hardest part will be done."

Daisy placed the tool upon the ground under the front axle, and began to work the lever. But the attempts at raising it into the higher notches proved all in vain; each time she lifted it up, it slipped back again the minute she released her hold. She gazed at Florence in despair.

"It won't work!" she exclaimed, resigning her position to the other girl. "I wish you'd try it!"

"Maybe it's broken," remarked Florence dolefully.

"No, I don't believe so. Only there's some trick to it—"

Florence took Daisy's place now, and began to manipulate the obstinate tool, and found it just as disobliging for her as it had been for her companion. She did not even attempt to conceal her distress; in fact she looked so mournful that the occupants of a passing car would not have been human had they not stopped to offer assistance.

"Puncture?" inquired a pleasant voice behind them, and a middle-aged man drew up his car beside the road. "Perhaps I can help?"

Both girls looked up eagerly and noted with bitterness that this man was just the sort from whom one might accept assistance, had it not been for the conditions of the journey. Florence hesitated a moment, as if she could not decide how to word the refusal, so as to make it seem courteous. At last she determined to tell the truth.

"I'm awfully sorry," she explained, "but we are crossing the continent with a party of girls who have pledged themselves not to accept help from men along the road. It's—it's hard, too, for we

don't know much about automobiles!" There was a little catch in her voice as she concluded.

A whimsical smile came over the face of the stranger and he glanced stealthily at the woman beside him.

"Then I suppose we must drive on," he began, when Daisy abruptly interrupted him.

"Could—could—does the lady know how to fix punctures?" she asked, her eyes lighting up with hope.

The woman shook her head regretfully.

"I'm awfully sorry," she replied, "but my husband has never taught me anything about the car, and I've always been content to let him do it all. I'm afraid that I'd know much less than you do yourselves."

Daisy's smile faded, but she pulled herself together sufficiently to thank them and to bid them drive on.

"But can't I just tell you how to work that jack?" asked the man. "Not do it for you, you understand; just give you a pointer?"

"No, thank you just the same," replied Florence, resolutely, "that wouldn't be fair. We're grown-up Girl Scouts, and we have to be trustworthy. So—" she made a violent effort to appear cheerful, "please don't let us waste any more of your time!"

As the machine drove away the girls turned again to their work, this time with renewed energy; finally

after about ten minutes' sustained effort, they succeeded in raising the car to the desired level. Without waiting to rest even a moment, Florence seized the wrench and began feverishly to turn the bolts. But here again she encountered difficulty, apparently they grew tighter instead of looser.

"I can't imagine what is the matter," she said. "It isn't as if Lily's car were new and stiff like the other. I'm sure all these tires have been changed before."

Daisy stood behind her, regarding her thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Flos," she said slowly, "I believe that you're turning those nuts the wrong way!"

Florence stopped for a moment and frowned.

"I believe you're right, Daisy," she acceded. "Yes—I guess I am!"

Then both girls laughed unrestrainedly.

"Let me try," suggested Daisy. "You're all worn out."

But try as they did for the next fifteen minutes, they could not unloosen all of the bolts that held the tire rim fast. At last they sat down in despair on the step of the car, and wiped the perspiration from their foreheads.

"I'm about ready to give up," admitted Daisy. "I'm all in."

"So am I," agreed Florence. "Shall we ask the next man that comes along?"

"I certainly hate to give in, but I'd almost be tempted to accept an offer if we got one."

"And forfeit our hope of winning the machines?" Florence reminded her. "Oh, surely, Daisy, we're too good sports for that."

"Well, we would have our trip, anyhow. We wouldn't be expected to turn back just for that."

"I don't know," answered Florence. "Let's rest for a while, and attack it later on. Maybe a woman will come along—"

"Or maybe the girls will miss us and come back to help."

"Or—maybe—maybe—" Florence strained her eyes—"yes! Daisy! Here comes the red car!"

"Not the one Alice has been so excited about?" Daisy jumped to her feet in her emotion.

"Yes, it is! And what's more, they're slowing down!"

"Oh, Flos, let's let them help us! I'm so tired. And the rules that old lady made are so ridiculous —she must be crazy!"

"Yes, I'd agree she was sort of crazy; who else would pay the expenses of six unknown people across the continent, just for the pleasure of presenting them with automobiles? We may never see the cars, anyway!—Still—I almost believe this may be

some sort of trap, as Alice thinks. Maybe the boys are going to try to tempt us."

"Well, then we won't give in!" announced Daisy, with sudden energy. "I'm not going to accept their help if I have to stay here a month!"

"That's the spirit!" cried Florence.

Both girls turned to their wheel again, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in their task as the brightly colored car drew up beside them. Neither looked up until one of the young men spoke.

"Pardon me," he began, in a soft, drawling tone, "but isn't there some way we could assist you young ladies?"

Florence and Daisy now had an opportunity to obtain a good look at these two youths, who had been so much in their minds during the previous day. Both were of blond complexion, with light eyes, which were covered by goggles; both were exceedingly well dressed in correct motor attire, their clothing bearing the unmistakable mark of the expensive tailor. In spite of themselves the girls were impressed.

"I'm awfully sorry," replied Florence as graciously as she could, "but we are not allowed to accept help from any members of the opposite sex. You see—" she smiled as she saw a puzzled expression on the strangers' faces—"you see we are travelling

across the country with a party, and that is one of the regulations!"

"How queer!" exclaimed the other young man, who up to this time had not spoken. "It sounds like nuns in a convent—"

"No, not nuns," returned Daisy; "only Girl Scouts."

"Then you mean to say that we can't even fix your puncture for you?" continued the stranger. "What utter nonsense! Why do you put up with any such fool rule?"

"Because the old lady who made it has arranged it to be worth our while to keep it," explained Florence. She watched the young men narrowly to see whether they would show any signs of knowledge of the affair, as Alice believed. But they appeared only politely curious.

"We're to receive run-about's if we make the trip as our sponsor dictated," she added. "So you better believe that we won't let a little puncture stop us."

While this conversation was going on, Daisy was racking her brain for a method of learning the young men's names, so that she might put Alice's theory to test. She could think of no way which was not abrupt; nevertheless she meant to risk anything for the sake of information.

"We have seen your car before," she remarked, glancing over at the red racer beside them. "It is

such a brilliant color—and—well—you have passed us several times!"

Both young men smiled in amusement.

"It did look rather strange, I guess," admitted the taller, better looking man; "if you didn't know our reason. We really aren't following you, though it might seem so. We're travelling across the continent too—and stopping in the principal towns to look up fraternity brothers. In fact," the young man concluded, "we are rounding up as many as we can for a convention in September."

"Oh, I see," said Florence, turning again to the wheel, and this time, to her extreme delight, succeeding in unloosening a nut. "Then perhaps we shall meet you again!"

"That would be delightful," he murmured courteously; then, leaning down, he almost took the wrench from Florence's hand.

"Just let me do this one—it's a tough one, I see!" he pleaded. "Nobody will see, and we'll never tell."

"No, no!" cried Florence, impetuously. "No, Mr.—?" She stopped, questioningly.

"McDaniel," supplied the young man, straightening up again and searching in his pocket for his card. His companion followed his example and a moment later each girl had in her possession the means of identifying both men. The names which they read were:

“Clyde Rutgers McDaniel”

and

“Vincent S. Cryton, Jr.”

Alice's theory was abruptly smashed to pieces!

Still the young men made no movement to go.

“Flos, you are worn-out!” exclaimed Daisy, with concern. “Let's allow Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton to finish, since they insist. After all, I don't care so awfully much about owning a car. It would be a dreadful nuisance, with its punctures and things—”

Mr. McDaniel made a motion to comply with the request and threw off his coat. Florence looked up, her face flushed with the effort, and caught sight of another machine with two more young men slowly approaching. But a sudden resolution took possession of her, and her eyes flashed defiantly.

“No! I am getting it now,” she replied. “And—I don't want to seem rude, but I'd really rather that you people would go on. We'll work faster—”

“Oh, certainly!” agreed Cryton, humbly. “We don't want to intrude—”

“And we thank you just the same,” added Daisy.

“You're sure that we can't help?” asked McDaniel, for the last time, as he went towards his own car. Then, remembering that he still had not learned the girl's names, he turned about abruptly and asked them.

"Florence Evans and Daisy Gravers," replied the latter, immediately. "We haven't our cards—"

"Oh, we won't forget them!" returned McDaniel, as he started the engine. "Goodbye—till we see you again!"

"Goodbye!" called both girls together.

As soon as the machine was out of hearing distance, the girls began to discuss the visit, and to laugh over Alice's mistake.

"I knew her theory was a wild one," remarked Florence. "Alice does fly off the handle, you know. Maybe she takes after that aunt of hers."

"And aren't you crazy to see the others and tell them all about it?" asked Daisy. "Our puncture did one good thing, anyhow. Now, let's work fast."

The rest and the fresh impetus to work gave the girls new courage, and they attacked the remainder of their task with added energy. In a very few minutes they succeeded in getting the tire off; after that it was a simple matter to adjust the spare, gather up their tools and go on.

After this rather extended delay, they naturally did not expect to catch up to the other car for some time, and were therefore greatly surprised to see it in less than ten minutes. Florence blew her horn continuously until she attracted the other girls' attention; then Ethel stopped and waited for her to pull

up along side of her car. A moment later they were comparing experiences.

"And did our friends of the bright red car stop and offer to help you?" asked Florence, casually, careful however to keep her eyes fastened upon Alice. The latter started visibly.

"No!" she cried. "Did they to you?"

"Yes—and we refused them."

"Naturally," replied Marjorie. "But did you get their names?"

Florence handed the cards to the girls in the other machine, while she told of their reason for such zigzag driving as they were engaging in.

"I don't believe in any fraternity story!" exclaimed Alice. "Those are assumed names! They're—they're—"

But the others interrupted her with their laughter.

"All the same," remarked Marjorie, as Ethel started her motor again, "I can't help thinking that maybe Alice is on the right track! Maybe they had something to do with scattering those tacks!"

And the girls gave some thought to the conjecture, for it was Marjorie Wilkinson who had uttered it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VISIT TO MAE'S.

FOR the next few days everything went serenely. The weather was fine, and the scenery beautiful; with the exception of one thunderstorm and the spoiling of some rather good food, the girls met with no misfortune whatever. Nor did they see the red car again until they stopped at a hotel in Pittsburg. Then they met the young men in the lobby, just as they were about to go in to dinner. Florence and Daisy both nodded graciously, and Alice squeezed Ethel's arm so hard that she exclaimed aloud.

"Now's our chance to pump them," the excited girl whispered. "Make Flos and Daisy introduce them!"

"You still really cling to the theory that they are on the look-out for us?" asked Ethel.

"Why, certainly; Aunt Emeline could hire other spies besides my cousins."

"Yes, but would she? Personally, I believe their own statement about their business, though they may be detectives or—"

"Do hurry, girls!" interrupted Marjorie, beckoning to them to follow her. "Everybody is waiting!"

As soon as they were seated at the table, Alice repeated her desire to be introduced to the two young men. Florence, however, was scornful of her reason.

"Don't be so impulsive, Alice!" she said. "There's nothing a bit unusual about those two men. It's easy to understand now why they go back and forth, first in one direction and then in another, whenever they get news of another fraternity brother to look up. However, you may as well meet them if you want to; after all they are rather stunning."

"Yes, in looks," admitted Marjorie. "But there is something about them that I don't like—I don't know just what—"

"They're not John Hadleys!" supplied Florence. "Well, wait till you meet them. I'll seize any opportunity that comes."

But unfortunately for Alice, no opportunity did come, for the young men left the hotel immediately after supper, not to return again. For the time being they were forgotten; indeed, the only event that loomed large before them was their visit to their old chum at Lima.

"And now for Mae's!" cried Marjorie, as she again took command of the wheel of the larger car,

and directed it through the city, back to the Lincoln Highway.

"That will be something like a stop," said Ethel, who happened to be riding beside her. "Friday—Saturday—Sunday—three whole days! We haven't been gone long, and yet I'll be glad for the rest."

"It will be nice," replied Marjorie. "But we can make little week-end stops all along the way, if we continue to run on scheduled time without any delays. We have two whole weeks extra, don't forget!"

"Still, we mustn't be too extravagant," Ethel reminded her.

And yet, in spite of their forebodings, they found no more difficulties in their path as the time progressed; indeed, they began to feel as if luck would be with them all the way. They drove into Lima on scheduled time, and went directly to Mae's new home.

They found it without any trouble, situated on the wide main street, farther out from the traffic and the places of business. The width of the avenue, the height of the lovely old shade trees, the dignity of the green and white house itself, surrounded by beds of flowers, took them somewhat by surprise; they had not expected to find anything so prepossessing in so small a town.

Carefully locking their machines, but leaving their baggage until later, they ran lightly up the hedge-

bordered walk to the porch. The prospect of seeing one of their missing comrades filled them all with delight, and made them act like children again.

"I'm going to be the first to give Mae a big hug!" exclaimed Alice, pushing right up to the door-step.

"No, me!" protested Daisy, as if she were a six-year-old.

"Here she comes!" announced Mrs. Remington, and both girls jostled each other towards the door. A moment later it was thrown open from the inside; but instead of Mae's smiling countenance they beheld the immovable face of a butler!

"Oh!" gasped Alice; but Mrs. Remington saved the situation by asking for Mrs. Melville.

"She is expecting you," answered the servant, quietly. "Please step in."

The interior of the house proved to be just as charming as the exterior. The wide, square hall with its lovely curved staircase, the big rooms on either side, now appearing cool and delightful with their summer hangings and grass rugs, the big screened windows reaching from the floor to the ceiling seemed so restful, so inviting to the girls after their hot trip. The whole house was much more sumptuous than anything they had pictured; for a moment they felt almost awe-struck, as if they were about to pay a formal call upon some older woman instead of being there to spend the week-end with

one of their chums. But as soon as Mae entered, they forgot their embarrassment.

"Don't you feel terribly dignified in this wonderful house?" asked Alice. "So grown-up—?"

"Only when the minister calls, or I am engaging a servant," Mae replied. "But just with Tom or my own friends, I still feel like a kid."

"And now tell us all about the wedding," pleaded Lily, unwilling to wait even until they had removed their hats.

This of course was a subject upon which Mae was well versed and she gladly went into details, describing everything she could think of to her interested listeners. Finally she rose with the suggestion that the girls go to their rooms.

"And you really have a place for us all?" asked Alice, incredulously.

"Yes, indeed," laughed Mae. "My one regret is that we couldn't put the boys up. There are four of them, besides Mr. Remington—"

"When are they coming?" interrupted Lily.

"Not till tomorrow afternoon. I am planning a little dinner-dance, just with the crowd and two extra young men Tom is inviting to make the numbers come out even."

"Oh, Mae!" exclaimed Marjorie. "You are making it so attractive that we will never want to go any further."

"Suits me! Why not stay here for the rest of the summer?"

"It would be lovely," sighed Daisy, who was a little weary from the trip.

Supper that evening was to be out of doors, in a charming little summer house overrun with rambler roses. The girls sat down on the rustic benches with deep sighs of content; they were glad to be still for a while, glad to be able to drop their sense of responsibility for the time being, and to know that they could enjoy this evening alone. It was Ethel who voiced the sentiment of the crowd.

"The party with the boys will be lovely tomorrow evening," she said, "but isn't it nice now just to be alone!"

"It certainly is," agreed Marjorie. "And I have such a ferocious appetite, Mae; I'm afraid I'm going to eat you out of house and home."

"No fear of that," returned her hostess. "Now girls, somebody has got to tell me all about your trip—I want every single detail!"

"Oh, it's been terribly uneventful," complained Alice. "Except for the red car, with the two good-looking young men, it's been too monotonous."

"What two young men?" asked Mae.

"Oh, nobody special," answered Lily, lightly. "Of course Flos and Daisy do think they're pretty

nice—" Then she went into detail about the story, insignificant as it was.

"Do you really think," inquired Mae, after Lily had finished, "that you are going to earn those cars at the end of the trip?"

"We're certain of it," said Marjorie, with the same assurance she had displayed all along.

This very positiveness was a source of great comfort to the more timid girls; in fact, all of the scouts had so much confidence in her that they rejoiced to find her so optimistic. It was only the boys who secretly experienced a feeling of dismay at her attitude. John Hadley in particular, though he liked to see Marjorie succeed in everything she undertook, had been hoping that she would give up this trip, which at the same time was so dangerous and so tiring. Besides, he hated to have the girl so far away, and so inaccessible to mail. In his inmost heart he had been cherishing the longing that something would happen to bring them nearer to home for the summer. However, he decided not to let any regrets disturb the enjoyment of this week-end.

The boys had arrived late in the afternoon, an hour or so before dinner; but Tom and his two guests had not yet put in an appearance. It was Alice who seemed most eager for them to come; perhaps this was because among the four young men now present —Jack Wilkinson, John Hadley, Dick Roberts, and

Bill Warner—she was not anyone's particular favorite.

"What are their names, Mae?" she asked.

"I forgot their first names," replied her hostess. "Their last names are McDaniel and Cryton. They're fraternity brothers of Tom."

"What?" cried Florence, with a start. "Not really? Are they strangers in town?"

"I believe so. Why? Do you know them?"

"I should say we do! Why, they're the mysterious men Alice was telling you about! Tell us about them, Mae!"

"I'm sorry," replied the bride, "but I never heard their names mentioned before. Evidently they are not intimate friends of Tom's. He said that they practically invited themselves; I believe they dropped into his office about some frat business, and told him he had to find them some amusement for Saturday night. Luckily, he hadn't asked anybody else yet for the dance, so he invited them to the party."

"And do they know that we are touring—I mean that the girls they are to meet are crossing the continent in a car?" asked Daisy, in an animated tone. "And that we are Girl Scouts—?"

"Yes, I believe Tom did mention something like that."

"Then they'll probably not be surprised to find out who we are!" exclaimed Daisy.

"Girls!" interrupted Alice. "There's something more than coincidence to this. Those young men *are* stalking us! I'm sure of it now."

"Alice, I thought we convinced you that there was nothing to that theory," protested Florence. "Won't you please forget it?"

"I'll try to," murmured the girl, meekly. "Still, I am crazy to meet them."

She did not have to wait long, for a few minutes later the young men arrived. They did not appear in the least surprised at seeing the girls again, and greeted Daisy and Florence as old friends.

"Companions of the road!" cried MacDaniel, shaking hands heartily.

"Here's hoping we can keep this up!" added Cryton. "It's mighty pleasant—"

"We didn't know you belonged to Tom's fraternity till Mae told us," said Daisy.

"Well, it's a very large organization," replied MacDaniel; "in fact, the second largest in the United States."

"Maybe you know my cousins," ventured Alice; "you seem to know so many people."

"What are their names?" inquired Cryton.

"Crowell—Milton and Vaughn, of San Francisco." She watched the young men narrowly.

"Yes, indeed!" replied both of them without the least hesitation.

"And my Aunt Emeline?"

"No, we have never met her."

Alice's face clouded; it was unlikely that the boys were carrying out a mission for a woman whom they did not know. They probably were not lying, or they would have concealed their acquaintance with her cousin. Alice heaved a sigh of disappointment.

Mae, who had noticed both Daisy's and Florence's interest in the young men, contrived to seat them next to each other at the table; and during the whole meal they so succeeded in absorbing the girls' attention that it was noticeable to the other members of the party. Marjorie even made a remark to this effect to John Hadley.

He hesitated a moment, choosing his words carefully before he ventured a reply.

"Marjorie," he said, almost under his breath, "I don't like those two young men."

Marjorie, who had been thinking the same thing herself, was surprised at his opinion.

"But why?" she asked.

"I can't explain it—but—well—they just look deceitful. And I don't like to see Daisy and Florence so interested."

"Oh, well," said the girl, lightly, "we probably won't see them again. So I guess it's no serious matter."

"Then you don't think that there is anything to this theory of Alice's?"

"Absolutely nothing! Except that both the young men are rather fresh, and think it smart to make themselves conspicuous."

"Just the same," observed John, "I wish that they were not travelling your direction across the continent."

But Marjorie only laughed at his fears, and before the discussion had a chance to go any further, the party adjourned to the porch. There the other groups were broken up, but Daisy and Florence, with the two young strangers, sought a corner by themselves, and, much to Marjorie's dismay, remained there until the music started. Even then, they did not dance much with the other boys; by the time the evening was over, Marjorie had begun to take John's words seriously.

It was not, however, until Sunday night that she was honestly worried. Then she overheard Daisy come to Mrs. Remington with the request that they be allowed to stay in Lima another day.

"Without us?" asked the older woman, in astonishment.

"Yes—and go on later with the little car. Mae will be delighted to put us up another night."

"Have you any special reason?" inquired Mrs. Remington.

"Yes, we want to go on a picnic with the boys. They know of the loveliest little stream—"

But Mrs. Remington shook her head.

"I couldn't let you, Daisy, unless the whole party stayed."

Marjorie frowned as she heard this suggestion, but Daisy jumped at it eagerly as the solution of her problem.

"Then you all stay too!" she pleaded.

In the end Mrs. Remington consented, and much to the delight of their hostess, the scouts remained until Tuesday morning.

"Three days gone out of our surplus of fourteen!" sighed Marjorie, when the time of the visit was up, and they took to the road again.

"But such happy days!" added Daisy, her eyes shining with the memory.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE NIGHT.

IT was with sincere reluctance that Florence and Daisy made their adieu to their new friends; indeed, it seemed almost as if they were willing to abandon their trip to extend their visit at Mae's. Marjorie, however, who could not forget John's estimate of the young men's characters, breathed a sigh of relief when they left Lima for good.

"How soon do you expect to meet your new friends again?" asked Ethel of Daisy.

"Not very soon," replied Daisy. "They are going to be off the Lincoln Highway for a while—going north to round up some frat brothers in Toledo."

"Then we won't have the fun of watching for the red car any more!" sighed Alice.

"It's not much fun, now the mystery is explained!" remarked Lily peevishly.

"The mystery of their interest being Daisy and Flos," teased Ethel. "Seriously, though, please tell

us when your next date is—for we know that you have one!"

"Well, I have to admit that we did make one," said Daisy, blushingly. "They're going to look us up at our hotel in Chicago."

Marjorie, who happened to be riding with Mrs. Remington in the little car, did not hear the remark at the time, but later when Lily repeated it to her, she frowned darkly.

"I almost wish that something would happen to delay us," she said. "I'd be willing to sacrifice one of our eleven extra days just to keep the girls from seeing those young men!"

"Not eleven any more, Marj!" corrected Lily. "We're not travelling this Sunday again, so that means another day counted out."

"Sure enough," agreed Marjorie. "But what is a day or so when everything is going so perfectly?"

"Sh! Don't boast, Marj! We have a long distance to go yet. Oh, won't it be great when we come back, and can take our own sweet time about it?"

"Yes, but the excitement is half the fun. Still, I would like to go and see Mae, and stay a little while longer this time. She invited us to stop on the way back, you know."

"Yes, I'd like to stop too," added Lily. "Oh, how I wish that this summer would last forever!"

"You've said that every summer, Lil—and we still continue to have good times!" Marjorie reminded her.

The days that followed seemed only to prove the truth of Marjorie's statement. The weather continued fine, and the road good; each evening the girls made their camp and stopped for the night. The rain obligingly held off until the week-end, when the party was comfortably established at a little inn.

"And tomorrow night we have to camp again," observed Marjorie, as she watched the sun trying to peep through the clouds at sunset. "I hope the ground gets dry."

"The only thing that worries me is food," remarked Mrs. Remington. "We'll have to camp several days, and there may not be many stores along the way. We must buy plenty."

"If we only had more room to pack it!" sighed Lily. "That one hamper isn't very big."

Nevertheless, they packed it scientifically and succeeded in storing enough to supply a much larger party for a week. Then they set off early in the morning to make their daily hundred miles.

The sun, which had appeared early in the day, vanished under the clouds by noon, and a light rain fell during the afternoon. The prospect of making camp under these conditions was not alluring, and

the girls began to look for houses. But the few that they saw were mean and tumble-down, obviously unfitted to afford accommodations for a party of seven. At last, however, the rain ceased, and Marjorie suggested that they make camp.

They were in a flat open space now, where only a few groups of trees dotted the landscape here and there. The ground itself looked damp and uninviting. The girls surveyed it with dismay.

"I don't care much about sleeping on this!" remarked Marjorie, as she looked about her.

"Maybe we could sleep in the cars," suggested Lily.

"I'm afraid not," answered Mrs. Remington. "There's too much baggage, and too little room. But I think we really might as well eat our supper here. Can we get along without cooking much?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Ethel, who had superintended the buying. "We have plenty of delicatessen stuff. But don't you think we ought to have something hot to drink?"

"And a fire would be awfully welcome," added Lily.

"How about coffee?" inquired Alice, already starting upon her search in the hamper.

"No, cocoa," advised Mrs. Remington. "We don't want to take any chances of staying awake on a night like this."

"And we want to turn in early," put in Ethel.

"At least if we can find a spot—" began Marjorie, squinting her eyes in all directions for a suitable location. "How about that little grove of trees over there?"

"Way over there?" demanded Alice incredulously, fixing her eyes upon the only trees anywhere near them. "That's too far from the road—"

"You mean that you're afraid?—"

"No, Marj—not for ourselves. But suppose the machines should be stolen!"

"Nonsense!" laughed the young lieutenant. "We could hear if they were. Besides, nobody steals cars out here—everybody owns them. And we have good locks."

"All right! I'm game if everybody else is."

The girls all pressed into the larger machine when supper was ready, and succeeded in finding some sort of places to sit. Alice and Daisy, it was true, were obliged to curl up on the floor.

"I'm glad that we bought plenty of food," remarked Ethel. "We ought to have some left over."

"Wait till you see how much I eat!" warned Alice. "I'm simply starved!"

"I guess that we didn't take long enough for our lunch," reasoned Mrs. Remington. "We were too anxious to get along."

"Well, we certainly have covered ground today,"

asserted Ethel, proudly. "The bad weather didn't bother us!"

"How many miles did we make?" asked Marjorie.

"A hundred and sixteen."

"Now if we only had a good comfortable bed—" began Lily, but she was interrupted immediately by Marjorie.

"Just wait till I find you a place! I have a notion that it will be as fine as the Waldorf-Astoria—"

"Where?" demanded two or three at once.

"After supper I'll show you!"

As soon as the meal was concluded and the food packed again into the hamper, they followed Marjorie to the spot she had selected for the camp. It was some fifty yards from the road; a little, secluded grove of trees, overgrown with vines. Underneath the ground was comparatively dry; it would be the best possible location for their camp.

"Do you really think we can all squeeze into there?" inquired Lily doubtfully.

"Yes, if we allot each girl so much space and no more," calculated Marjorie. "And we hardly need to put up our tents!"

"Suppose it pours?" asked Alice.

"Alice, you're always bringing up too many objections!" cried Ethel. "We have to take chances on a trip like this."

"But suppose we can be seen from the road," persisted the other. "I'd hate to have the tourists watch me snore!"

"No one can possibly see us! And besides, we can use our tents to cover the ground, and keep us dry."

In the end Marjorie's common sense prevailed as it usually did, and the girls locked their cars and prepared for sleep. They managed to stretch mosquito netting over themselves, from tree to tree, and settled down to the spots which they were assigned. Marjorie slept nearest to the opening, with her revolver at her side.

It was some time before she was able to go to sleep; besides the occasional sound of a passing car, she imagined that she could hear footsteps, and she kept listening intently. The sky had entirely cleared now, and the stars were shining; as she lay there on the canvas she kept opening her eyes and gazing up at them. She did not feel in the least afraid, camping out there in the open, but she sincerely hoped that nothing would happen for the other girls' sake. Anything out of the ordinary might throw some of them into a nervous state, which up to the present they had been able to avoid. Once this calm were disturbed, it might be very difficult to induce them to camp in the lonely places along the road. And Marjorie preferred them to the regular sites.

So she continued to listen intently; once she was almost sure that she heard a machine stop out on the road. Not wishing to arouse the others, she cautiously raised herself to a sitting position and peered out through the trees. But she distinguished only the two reds lights of the silent cars by the side of the road.

She was just about to lie down again when she thought that she heard a faint scuffling noise, which seemed to come from the direction of their cars, and she made up her mind to investigate. Managing to creep through the enclosure without causing any disturbance, she stepped out clear of the trees. Accustomed now to the darkness, she looked down towards the road, and to her sudden alarm, identified the shadowy outline of a third car, behind both of theirs, and carrying no light. A sense of fear took possession of her, and she grasped the tree to steady herself; then, in another moment the car started quietly, and drove away. When it was almost out of sight she saw it flash on its lights.

The tree branch at her side rustled slightly, and she turned sharply around. Ethel Todd stood at the opening beside her.

"What's the matter, Marj?" she demanded, in a whisper.

"Nothing," replied Marjorie. "I just thought that I heard something."

"And did you?"

"Evidently not. I didn't see anything to cause alarm."

"Positively?"

Marjorie hesitated; she did not want to lie, and she felt that there would be no danger in giving Ethel the little she did know.

"Well, I did see a car stopped by the road-side. But it's gone now."

"A puncture, I suppose," Ethel surmised. "What kind of car?"

"A small one—I couldn't see very well. It didn't have any light."

"Didn't have any light!" repeated the other girl. "That looks suspicious. Did it stop very near to ours?"

"Yes, right behind it." Marjorie took a few steps away from the trees, in order not to waken the others by their whispering. "And," she added, "it reminded me of the racer!"

"Not the red car?" demanded Ethel. "You mean our friends?—"

"Yes. I thought of them."

"But they're not anywhere near here," said Ethel lightly. "Besides, what would they want?"

"Oh, I don't know—maybe some fool practical joke. I had a sort of feeling that they meant to

hang around. And I don't like them. They seem like adventurers or fortune-hunters, or something of the sort."

"But we have too much sense to let them 'adventure' with us, and we have no fortunes!" protested Ethel. "So why worry?"

"I guess there really is nothing to worry about," replied Marjorie. "Still, you know Daisy and Flos are so young, and they do seem smitten."

"Well, the youths may be all right at that. You take John's opinions too seriously, Marj. Come on, let's go back to bed!"

Although Marjorie was able to forget the incident for the time being and to go to sleep, she was reminded of it again the next morning the minute that she opened her eyes. For she was awakened by the announcement that they had been robbed the previous night.

"Robbed?" she cried, jumping up and running down to the big car, where most of the other girls were already gathered. "How much? What?"

"Not of any money," replied Mrs. Remington. "I had that beside me, and I would have wakened up if anybody had come near. But—some of you girls may think that it's a worse loss than money—all our food's gone! They took hamper and all!"

Marjorie looked from one to the other, aghast

at the news, which by this time was familiar to the rest of the scouts. She glanced questioningly at Ethel, and saw by her expression that she had said nothing of their alarm in the night. But no doubt this was the explanation of the halted car.

"But what are we to do?" demanded Alice, almost hysterically.

"We'll have to go back," replied Mrs. Remington, quietly. "For there may be no stores farther on, and we know of the one we left yesterday."

"But that will mean a whole day lost!" wailed Florence.

"Two days, Flos," Ethel corrected her. "One day going back, and another day coming forward. What's the matter with your mathematics?"

"Two, out of our surplus of ten—that leaves us eight." Marjorie calculated rapidly. "Yes, it will be our best plan to spend our time as Mrs. Remington suggests—it will be the most economical in the end."

"Couldn't we beg or buy a meal at one of these shacks that we're always passing?" suggested Florence.

"No, we'd be running too big a chance," answered their chaperone. "The food might not be good—we might all get sick. Besides, we have several days of camping ahead, and we must store up."

"But who do you suppose did it?" persisted Alice.

It was then that Marjorie told her story, omitting, however, the fact that she had noticed a resemblance to the red car.

"What kind of people could they be to want to steal food?" asked Florence. "Why food in particular?"

"That is just what puzzles me," answered Mrs. Remington. "They must be campers, like ourselves."

"I have an idea!" cried Alice. "Suppose we steal some from the next machine that comes along! If we only weren't Girl Scouts--"

"Come, let's stop this talking and do something!" said Florence, who was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger. "Shall we try to catch the car? Would you know it again, Marj?"

"Hardly. It was too dark. I merely saw that it was a low, small car without a top, and that it carried no lights. I'm afraid we can't hope to catch it." She cast a significant glance at Ethel.

"Well, there's not much harm done," declared Mrs. Remington cheerfully, as she began to make preparations for departure. "We have plenty of money left, and we can afford to lose a little time. So let's hurry and be on our way again. At least we can have a drink of water for breakfast."

"If only we could catch the thieves!" sighed Alice, as she walked back to the grove.

"Maybe we will yet!" Marjorie muttered under her breath to Ethel.

CHAPTER IX.)

NO MAN'S LAND.

RE-ENFORCED again with food and supplies, the girls set out upon the road which by this time had become familiar. But they decided not to risk camping in the spot which had proved so unlucky; instead they preferred to avail themselves of the public grounds set aside for the purpose.

They continued to follow the Lincoln Highway until it was time to turn north to Chicago, for in this city they were to rest for a day or two and do a little shopping. Of all the party Marjorie alone was in favor of limiting their stay to one night; the majority however prevailed, and two of their eight surplus days were to be sacrificed. Daisy and Florence were both enthusiastic supporters of the proposition.

They arrived in Chicago late in the afternoon and drove immediately to their hotel, where they had arranged by telegram for rooms. Hardly had they settled themselves and their belongings before Florence was summoned to the telephone. She was

gone nearly fifteen minutes; then she returned in high spirits to the group assembled in Marjorie's room.

"We don't need to ask who it was who wanted you!" teased Alice.

Florence blushed slightly. Then, turning to their chaperone:

"Mrs. Remington, do you think it would be all right for us to go to dinner with Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton? You know they are taking us all to the theatre afterwards."

"Why yes," assented the older woman. "I don't see any objection."

Marjorie frowned imperceptibly; it was evidently to be a case of these two young men morning, noon, and night as long as they remained in Chicago.

"How long are your friends to be in this city?" she inquired.

"Oh, indefinitely," replied Daisy. "They don't expect to start west for a week or so."

"Then we shan't see them again after this visit?" asked Ethel, without regret.

"I hardly think so," answered the other.

This piece of information, however, made Marjorie decide that she would make an opportunity to question them about their whereabouts on Monday night. It was not that she really expected to learn anything definite; nevertheless she felt that if they

had played a practical joke on the girls by stealing the food, she might be able to embarrass them and thus conclude that they were guilty. Accordingly, she managed to secure a seat next to McDaniel at the theatre that evening, and when Daisy, who was next to him on the other side, was busy talking to Cryton, she seized her chance.

"Have you heard about our robbery?" she asked, watching him closely.

She thought that there was the least perception of a start in her companion's facial expression.

"Yes, Miss Evans told us at supper. It certainly was too bad."

"The part that puzzles us," she continued, "is why anyone wealthy enough to own an automobile would steal such a cheap article as food."

"Your thieves were probably hungry!" laughed the young man. "I've known times in college when I felt so starved that I'd have been willing to steal!"

"But not from helpless girls!" Marjorie protested.

"I should say not! I wish instead that we had been near enough to come to your rescue. Here we were comfortably enjoying ourselves at a smoker—I recall the night, it had been such a disagreeable day—and we—" The rise of the curtain put an abrupt end to his sentence. "I hope the show is good," he concluded, turning his attention to the stage.

When Marjorie later repeated the conversation to Ethel, she admitted that she had abandoned the idea of these young men being guilty. They might be silly and frivolous, but at least they had not set out to be mean. The alibi of the smoker was conclusive proof.

But although she dismissed her suspicion concerning the two young men, she did not find that she liked them any better as the time passed. And much to her dismay the concensus of opinion was to delay the stay in the city another day on account of inclement weather. Marjorie and Ethel were the only ones opposed to the plan.

"But it brings our surplus time down to five days!" she protested. "And we've only gone half way."

"But nothing will go wrong," argued Florence. "And that is what we have our extra time for—to rest during bad weather."

"But the weather isn't very bad," remarked Ethel. "It may be lots worse than this farther on."

"Well, no matter what it is like we will start on our way tomorrow."

"That reminds me," said Daisy, "Mr. Cryton told me of a new short-cut to the Lincoln Highway. If we follow his directions, we can save from two to three hours."

Marjorie looked up hopefully at this piece of

news; indeed it seemed now as if her main object in life were to save time. If these young men suggested the means to accomplish this, they were not so useless after all.

"Did you get the exact directions?" she asked of Daisy.

"Yes, Flos did. She made a little map and put it all down. Mr. Cryton said that about half a mile of the road was poor, but except for that little stretch, it is even better than the Lincoln Highway."

The others were all heartily in favor of following the directions, and early the next morning the party started off again. The weather had cleared again and the sun was shining brightly; but on the grass and in the road there was still evidence of the recent rain. Daisy sat beside the driver on the front seat of the larger car, and held the plan open in her hands, for all the scouts were anxious to make no mistake which might end in a delay.

They followed a good macadam street for several miles to the outskirts of the city, then came to their first turning. It proved to be a dirt road—a rather narrow one at that—which sloped gradually down hill.

"This must be the stretch of bad road which the boys mentioned," remarked Marjorie. "It looks rather doubtful to me."

"Yes," returned Daisy, consulting her diagram.
"This is the poor part."

"Had we better risk it?" asked Marjorie.

"Surely!" cried two or three of the others.

"Nobody can say that Girl Scouts are poor sports!" added Florence, from the rear seat.

Accordingly, Marjorie turned into it, and threw on the gas. The road, which would have been uninviting in dry weather, appeared as they advanced to be almost a sea of mud after the recent rains. But the brave driver went resolutely ahead.

Three or four minutes passed without anyone's uttering a word, each was so busy silently watching the ruts and the road ahead. For a short distance the car proceeded reluctantly in high gear, but as they continued to descend, the accumulated rain water caused the road to become heavier, and Marjorie was forced to shift successively from high gear to second, and from second to low. It was with great difficulty that she kept the car going straight ahead; every time she steered out of the natural ruts in an attempt to find more solid ground, the rear of the car slithered around in first one direction and then another, till it looked at times as if they were about to slide into the ditches on either side of the road. Afraid to stop, for fear of being unable to start again, Marjorie kept the engine racing, yet they were making but little headway; the

rear wheels revolved in the slippery mud as if upon a tread-mill.

The girls sat there, fascinated and helpless, watching Marjorie's efforts. They were powerless to help her, and knew it; for she was by far the best driver among them. Daisy was the first to break the silence; it was she who felt responsible for bringing this misfortune upon the others.

"It can't be much farther," she said. "At least, if this map is true to proportions."

Marjorie said nothing; all of her energy was directed in keeping the car in the middle of the road. The engine was exceedingly hot now, and the mud, instead of lessening, seemed to become even thicker, and she could feel the car slowing down under the strain as if it were giving out. She looked ahead and beheld, to her immense delight, that they had reached the lowest point of the road, and presumably the wost; for in the distance she could see that it ascended gradually, and in doing so, looked more substantial.

The sight fired Marjorie anew. It was such a short distance to go! If she could only make it! She braced her aching shoulders and tired arms for a renewed effort.

Ethel saw the look of determination on her face, and encouraged her.

"Hang on, Marj, old scout!" she urged. "Don't

give up the ship! Get us out of this and we'll invent a new merit badge to reward you with!"

But the car, despite Marjorie, had made as much progress as it could; whether it was because the motor was overheated, or because they encountered an unusually deep rut, the engine, after a spasmodic pant or two, stopped dead, and the car settled back comfortably in the ooze. The girls let out a distressing groan.

There was a moment of deep silence after the labored chugging of the engine had ceased, and then they heard Lily's car churning behind them.

"Can't you even pull over a little?" demanded Florence. "To let Lily's car pass?"

But it was too late. In turning out, Lily's engine had also stalled, and the car came to a stop six or eight feet behind the other. The girls looked at each other in dismay.

"Now this is a pretty muddle to get into!" called Lily, from the rear.

"Mud-dle is good!" remarked someone; "but how are we to get out?"

"Let her cool a while," Ethel advised; "and then try her again."

"Some more of our precious time!" muttered Marjorie, peevishly, as she mopped the perspiration from her face. She could not help holding it against Daisy and Florence.

Accordingly, they set themselves to the unpleasant task of waiting. After five minutes' time, Marjorie decided to try again. But although the engine started bravely enough, the car stubbornly refused to move forward. The rear wheels, turning in the rut, sent forth a shower of mud, and since they would not take hold, only dug them in deeper. Repeated attempts proved fruitless, and were finally abandoned.

"We'll have to be towed out!" remarked Marjorie, grimly.

"By whom?" asked Ethel.

Marjorie shrugged her shoulders; she could not see much hope.

"Maybe one of the farm-houses has a horse—" she began.

"Girls!" cried Alice, abruptly. "Look who are coming towards us!"

"Who?" demanded everyone instantly. All eyes strained in the direction of the good road, far ahead of them.

"I do believe it's the boys!" cried Daisy, gleefully.

"The mysterious car!" laughed Alice.

"They had better not come near us!" muttered Ethel. "They are not in high favor."

"But if they can help us—" suggested Daisy.

"We couldn't accept it, and we wouldn't!" an-

nounced Marjorie, decisively. "Don't forget our regulations!"

"My gracious, I had forgotten," Daisy admitted.

The young men were near enough to wave to the girls now, and they stopped their car close to the muddy piece of road and got out. Then, cautiously picking their way, they advanced to the standing machines.

"I should think you two would be ashamed to show your faces!" Florence called, accusingly, as soon as they were within hearing distance.

Instantly both men were all apologies; they explained that they knew the road only in dry weather, when it had not been impassible; then, when they had come across another muddy road that morning, they realized what this one could be, and hastened with all speed to the scouts' rescue, should they be needed.

"But we told you before that we couldn't accept help from men," Florence explained.

"I know—but this is different!" protested Cryton. "This is serious."

"Please let us try to tow you out!" urged McDaniel. "Our engine is a mighty powerful one."

"No!" replied Marjorie, stubbornly. "Never! I'd rather leave the cars and go back home." And from the expression on her face, the men knew that she meant what she said.

"But you can't wait here all day," objected Crichton.

"No," answered Marjorie, opening the door of her car. "I am going to the nearest farm house."

"And I'm going with you!" cried Ethel, always on the alert for action.

The girls picked their way through the sticky mud, often sinking ankle deep into its depths. But their shoes were stout and their stockings of wool, so they did not mind.

Meanwhile the men took their seats in the car, and used every argument they could think of to induce the scouts to change their minds. But they might as well have saved their breath; fifteen minutes later when Marjorie and Ethel returned, they had not made any progress.

"What success?" demanded Alice, expectantly.

"None!" replied Marjorie, with a dismal smile.

"You didn't find a farm house?"

"Yes, we did."

"But they had no big horses?"

"Yes, they had some splendid horses."

"Marj, tell us!" cried Florence, in exasperation.

"Wouldn't they come out and help us?"

"Yes, they would," answered Marjorie sadly. "That's the worst of it. They were both willing and capable of helping. *But they were men!*"

The girls all groaned at the mention of this re-

striction, which seemed to thwart them at every point. McDaniel and Cryton were unfeeling enough to laugh out loud.

"A nice place to camp—here in the mud!" remarked the latter, sarcastically. "And just sit around and wait for dry weather—"

"Hush!" remonstrated Florence, in irritation. It was bad enough to be in such a plight without being taunted about it.

"Then you will accept our help?" asked McDaniel seriously. "You might as well let us do something as to allow strangers."

"No," replied Marjorie, firmly; "because we're going to help ourselves!"

The men opened their eyes wide in astonishment.

"But how?" demanded Cryton, incredulously.

"I would prefer to have you people drive on first," said Marjorie, coldly, instead of answering the young man's question. "I wouldn't want it even to look as if you were helping us."

"Certainly," answered McDaniel, who seemed to be the more courteous of the two.

Marjorie resumed her seat in the car and said nothing more until the red racer was out of sight. Then she explained her plan briefly.

"Do you see that broken fence over there?" she asked. "I mean to take two of those rails, put them

under the back wheels, and start the engine. If everything works as I think, we'll be out of here in less than five minutes."

Without any further delay the girls obtained their rails, all of them remaining out of the car until the experiment was over. Marjorie took her seat at the wheel and started the engine. To the supreme delight of all the scouts the car gave a mighty lurch and started forward! Two minutes later it reached the solid ground.

"Now to help Lily!" cried Marjorie, jumping out of her machine.

The smaller car proved equally easy to move; as the girl had promised, they were on their way again in less than five minutes' time.

"And I hope we pass the red car again!" cried Alice, triumphantly. "Just so we can tell those young men—"

"Something tells me," remarked Ethel, enigmatically, "we are due to hear from them again!"

"I agreed with you!" added Marjorie, stonily.

CHAPTER X.

AN APPEAL FOR HELP.

IT was the fifteenth of July when the Girl Scouts of Pansy Troop left the town of Rawlins, in Wyoming, and struck out towards the desert. All had been going well since their encounter with the mud outside of Chicago; they had travelled on schedule time, meeting with no delays of any sort. Nor had they seen anything of the red car since that last encounter; perhaps the men were really nowhere in the vicinity, as they had said; or perhaps they knew that they were in high disfavor. Even Daisy and Florence forbore to mention their names to the other girls.

Now only two weeks more of their time remained, but, according to all their calculations they believed that they could cover the ground in ten days. Even Ethel and Marjorie felt extremely optimistic with their five days to the good.

They came to the desert—a vast expanse of gray and brown sand, where water was so scarce that it was sometimes sold at the railroad stations. There

was very little of interest to be seen along the way; now and again they noticed the dried-up carcasses of sheep and cattle which had probably been killed in the severe storms that raged in the winter. Once they had to stop for a long freight train, whose conductor waved friendly greetings, pleased it seemed, to see some human beings in this lonely place. And many times the girls noticed the remains of former camps.

Food and water were both scarce, so they held on to what they had, fearful lest their former misfortune might be repeated. But, when they had been travelling steadily forward for two days across the desert without any signs of being molested, they began to feel that they would go the rest of the way in safety.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could drive up to the ranch," observed Marjorie, as they passed over the ground nearly south of it. "Only two years ago—"

"Ah, if we only had the time!" sighed Ethel. "How I should love to see my old horse!"

"Well, we have five days," Alice reminded them. "Why not use them?"

"Because something tells me that we shall need every single one of them yet," responded Marjorie. "Whether it is fate, or whether Aunt Emeline actually has arranged obstacles for our path, it just seems as if we have so many delays to meet—"

"But how could Aunt Emeline do anything?" interrupted Alice. "Remember her age!"

"Well, anyway, we're not wasting any time! We've kept all the other regulations—not taken help from any men, and lived within our allowance, and worn our uniforms all the time—we mustn't slip up on our time. So let's go as straight as we can to San Francisco!"

"Marjorie," put in Mrs. Remington, "don't you think we had better stop soon? It's getting dark, and you know how hard it is to make camp without being able to see what we are doing."

"Besides," added Alice, "I'm about starved."

Marjorie glanced at her speedometer before replying.

"But we have only made seventy-two miles today," she said. "And you know our resolution to cover a hundred!"

"Remember that this is the desert!" Florence reminded her; "And we can't expect—" She stopped abruptly, her attention drawn by the loud sobs of a woman, coming from an abandoned wagon by the side of the road. Marjorie too heard the weeping and instinctively stopped her car a few feet beyond. The scouts looked at each other in doubt as to their proper course of action.

"Ask her whether we can help," whispered Alice to Mrs. Remington.

"Maybe the child is hurt," suggested Florence.
"There is a child beside her, isn't there?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Mrs. Remington. "And perhaps I had better get out."

The girls watched their leader in admiration as she walked back to the stranger and offered assistance in her tactful, reassuring tone. The woman's sobs ceased, and though the scouts were too polite to look around, they knew that Mrs. Remington had made herself welcome.

"But you're goin' the wrong way!" protested the woman. "And it's gettin' awful dark now."

As she uttered these words the smaller car pulled up behind the wagon and came to a stop. Mrs. Remington nodded briefly to the girls and went on with her conversation.

"But I do wish you would tell me your trouble," she pleaded. "Is—your little girl hurt?"

The stranger bent tenderly over the sleeping form at her side.

"No, not hurt," she answered; "but sick. She's got a fever."

"But how do you happen to be here?"

"Our hoss up and died on us, and me husband started to walk to our shack—about forty mile on a piece. That was yesterday noon. But we have so little food, and less water—"

"We can help you out!" cried Ethel, who had

been listening from the driver's seat of the small car. "We have lots—"

"But me child may die before me husband gets back with another hoss! It's a doctor we want—" She broke into sobs again—"or a comfortable bed—"

Mrs. Remington's heart was sincerely touched; she hesitated no longer, for she knew that the scouts would be with her to a girl. They would sacrifice some of their surplus time and money to drive the child to safety.

"We will take you to your husband," she volunteered; "at least if you are willing to leave your wagon here."

A look of intense gratitude crossed the woman's face.

"You mean to say you would go forty mile out of yer way, just to help a woman you have never seen before?" she asked, incredulously.

"Why certainly!" exclaimed Lily. "We're Girl Scouts, and they have to do good turns every day."

"And what are Girl Scouts?" inquired the woman, wearily, but the girls knew from her tone that she was not really desirous of an explanation. Instead, Marjorie suggested action.

"Let's start immediately," she said. Then turning to the other girls, she added, "It ought to

cost us only one day, and you know we have five to spare."

Both cars turned about and started again towards the east. Travelling at night, which was never a pleasure to the girls, seemed doubly difficult in the desert; yet Marjorie felt that they did not dare wait until the morning; for, even though they might be able to afford the time, she understood the necessity of getting the sick child to safety. So she pressed resolutely on, and said nothing of her hunger pangs.

After they had been driving an hour or so, however, Mrs. Remington felt that it would be unwise to go further without food, and suggested that they stop and make a hasty meal. The scouts were all heartily in favor of this proposition.

"How about you?" asked Mrs. Remington, turning to the stranger.

"A bite to eat would taste mighty good," she responded, wearily.

They pulled up the cars by the road side, and took out their folding stove. If they were to continue on their way during the night, they would need coffee and substantial food to re-enforce them.

While Lily and Marjorie were unpacking the hamper, Alice spread a blanket on the seat for the sleeping child. To her surprise, however, the little

girl awoke and immediately began to manifest a remarkable interest in the whole proceeding.

It was Mrs. Remington who first began to doubt the truth of the woman's story.

"I don't believe that your little girl has any fever, Mrs.—?" She stopped for the stranger to supply her name.

"Hook," answered the latter, briefly.

"But I'll get my thermometer—it's right here in the kit," she continued.

She wiped the little instrument off, and inserted it between the child's lips. A minute later she announced that her temperature was normal.

"Are you hungry?" she asked the little girl.

"You bet!" replied the child, without the slightest hesitation.

It was after the meal was over that Mrs. Remington confided her suspicions to Marjorie.

"That little girl isn't sick at all," she whispered; "it was merely a ruse to get us to drive them back. Still, I'm not sorry that we are doing it—"

"No, a night alone in the desert isn't particularly enviable," remarked the young lieutenant. "And besides, she seemed awfully poor."

Less than an hour had elapsed before the girls were back in their cars again, resigned to the undertaking they had assumed. The weary monotony of the desert stretched before them, but they did not

flinch. Each girl took her turn at the wheel, drove for an hour, and wakened the next in turn. Marjorie alone had been keeping watch on the speedometer; she did not want to pass the shack that was to be their destination without knowing it.

She was driving herself when the thirty-five mile mark was passed, and she began to scan the distance eagerly for some sign of a structure. Yet she continued to see nothing except the monotonous expanse of gray sand in every direction. Tired as she was, she began to question the existence of such a shack as the woman had mentioned. How would it be possible, she thought, for a family to live in the desert, to own a shack only forty miles away from the place where the wagon was standing? Gradually as the speedometer crept on to the forty mark, her suspicions became verified; there was no structure of any sort within sight. Nevertheless she resolved to arouse the stranger and ask her for information.

She waited until they came to a station of the railroad—a lonely, forsaken building—and brought her car to a stop.

"Is this where you wanted to go?" she asked, leaning back and touching Mrs. Hook's knee. "We have gone forty-three miles."

The woman raised her head and looked about wearily.

"Land! No! This a'int half way! There must be somethin' ailin' your clock."

"No there isn't!" replied Marjorie. "How much farther is it?"

"Not so very far, I reckon. I'll watch and tell you!"

With a tired sigh, Marjorie turned to the wheel again, and drove until her time was up. Then she resigned her place to the next in turn, and she to the next, until the darkness faded into a gray, and the gray into dawn. If the girls had not been so utterly worn-out, they might have been thrilled at the sight of the sunrise; as it was, they scarcely noticed it.

At six o'clock Lily stopped the big car.

"We'll have to get some sleep!" she declared—"Before it gets too hot—or we'll be dead!"

"You're right," agreed Mrs. Remington, wearily. She had long ago begun to doubt the wisdom of their proceeding.

The girls climbed out of the car and stretched themselves on their blankets in its shadow. But they could not sleep long; the heat soon grew too intense, and they began to feel hungry. While Alice and Lily were preparing a hasty breakfast, Mrs. Remington and Marjorie and Ethel took council together.

"It's my opinion," observed Ethel caustically,

"that this woman is making a good thing of us—for free passage across the desert!"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," said Marjorie. "And yet you can't blame her. She's poor and deserted—"

"Marj, would you make a pun at a time like this!" remonstrated Ethel. "Why, you're almost talking in your sleep!"

"And the child isn't a bit sick," added Mrs. Remington, with an attempt to bring the girls back to the subject in question. "And yet—what can we do? Not leave them here in the middle of the desert—?"

"It's where we found them!" flashed Ethel.

"But at least they had a wagon!" put in Marjorie. "No, let's take her all the way—wherever it is—"

"She expects to go all the way back to Rawlins!" remarked Ethel. "That's her scheme—"

"I know—but—well, if she didn't have a child it would be different. No, let's take her back to civilization."

In the end Marjorie won. All day long they continued to drive eastward at a greater rate of speed, contenting themselves with crackers and fruit for luncheon in order to save time. At nine o'clock that evening they pulled into Rawlins, and went straight to the hotel. In spite of her feeling that Mrs. Hook had been deceiving them, Marjorie invited her and her child to remain there all night at her expense.

Mrs. Hook, however, refused to take advantage of the offer.

"I expect to find some money waiting for me here, thank you," she replied, stepping up to the desk.

"Money!" gasped Marjorie, scrutinizing the woman in amazement. "Then it was Rawlins where you expected to come to all the time—and not a shack in the desert?"

Mrs. Hook nodded, shame-facedly.

"And you did mean to deceive us?"

Again the woman acquiesced.

Marjorie looked chagrined, and said nothing more; but she remained at her side while she waited for the clerk.

"Any mail for Mrs. Hook?" she asked.

The young man produced an envelope, which, however, bore no stamp or postmark, and she opened it eagerly, yet cautiously, and peered inside. But she was not quick enough, for before she had slipped it into her bag, Marjorie had identified the contents as a one-hundred dollar bill! The girl was never so puzzled in her life.

Turning hastily away, she joined the rest of the party just as they were entering the dining-room, and managed to secure a seat next to Ethel. As soon as her opportunity came, she confided the news to her.

"There's something queer about that woman," remarked her companion when she had heard Marjorie's story. "I guessed all along that she wasn't straight."

"What I would like to find out," said Marjorie, "is whether she is just an ordinary sponger, or somebody set on our track. Now, we have two mysteries to solve—this and the one of the stolen food!"

"Perhaps," remarked Ethel, "when we meet Aunt Emeline she'll have something to say."

"If only we get there on time!" sighed Marjorie. "Three more of our extra days are gone!"

"And yet," added Ethel, "we still have two to the good!"

CHAPTER XI.

SALT LAKE CITY.

THE weary monotony of the ride across the desert was to be broken; the Girl Scouts had decided to use one of their surplus days at Salt Lake City. They wanted to get more than a fleeting glimpse of the picturesque beauty of which they had heard so much, and they longed to swim in Great Salt Lake, where, according to all accounts, one could not sink.

The girls gave over their morning to sight-seeing, and, though they were making use of the lovely shady camp grounds provided by the city, they determined to eat their noon meal at a hotel, in order that they might feel rested for the afternoon's swim.

They stopped at the post-office to inquire for mail, and were not disappointed, for the clerk handed them a sizeable bundle. Florence and Daisy expressed particular eagerness.

"Well, when do you see them again?" asked

Alice, watching Daisy's countenance as she perused a fat letter.

"See whom?" demanded the girl, blushing.

"You know—the occupants of the red car."

"When we get to California—probably the second of August. Isn't that what your letter says, Flos?"

"Yes, Mr. Cryton is going to be waiting on the doorstep when we take the milk bottles in in the morning," laughed Florence, reading an extract from her letter. "But say, won't it be great to have them help us with our new cars when we get them! For I don't put much stock in those two nephews!"

"Neither do I" agreed Alice; "they sound as if they were sort of wishy-washy—the kind that wait around for somebody else's money! But do you really think we're going to get there in time?"

"I hope so. But both Marj and Ethel seem worried, and that's a bad sign."

"What's a bad sign?" questioned Marjorie, looking up from her letter at the mention of her own name.

"That you don't like our friends of the red car!" returned Florence. "Because you know that you don't, Marj!"

"No, I'll admit that I don't care a lot about them," replied the other truthfully. "My brother didn't like them much either—he asked about them

in this letter, and hoped that you hadn't allowed them to get too intimate."

"I can't see that it concerns him—or John Hadley either!" flashed Florence, angrily. "Why they should they take it upon themselves—"

"Please don't play grandma!" put in Daisy, imploringly.

"All right—anything so that you hurry and give us plenty of time at the lake."

It was not long before the girls were in their tents again, preparing for the excursion of the afternoon. Marjorie was the first to be dressed, and she took the time to survey her uniform while she waited for the others.

"Girls," she remarked dismally, "don't you think this is a sorry sight? Oughtn't we to be washing them again?"

"Mine is awfully dirty," agreed Lily; "I'm ready to join you!"

"You don't mean to wash them in the Lake?" demanded Alice.

"No," laughed Marjorie; "I only meant we had better do them soon."

"Yes, because we'll have to wear them when we meet Aunt Emeline!"

"We better have them on then!" put in Florence. "Well, let's do it after our bath."

"No, we may be too tired then," said Marjorie.

"Let's wash them now, before we go, and hang them out to dry. Then we'll have them ready, in case it should rain tonight."

The resolution was adopted by all members of the party, and one by one the girls appeared from the tents and set about their self-appointed tasks. In half an hour they were finished, and Girl Scout uniforms hung about on all sides, testifying to their labor. They surveyed the result in amusement.

"Nobody would need to ask who we were," remarked Daisy.

"We're certainly carrying out Aunt Emeline's orders to the letter," added Alice. "We're displaying our uniforms all the time, one way or another—even when they're wet!"

Mrs. Remington and Daisy had volunteered to stay at home and take care of the tents while the party went to the lake, for both said that they were tired and would be glad of the opportunity to rest. Therefore, dismissing worry from their minds, the other five girls drove off in the larger car and spent a most enjoyable afternoon, floating and swimming in the extremely salt water. They returned refreshed and invigorated.

"We'll have to do some ironing tonight," observed Marjorie as they returned to the camp. "Because we can't all use the iron tomorrow."

"But we're staying here all night tomorrow, aren't we?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, that's true. I wonder whether the uniforms are dry."

"They must be," replied Alice, shading her eyes with her hand in order to get a view of their tent. "I see our tents, but not any uniforms!"

"Mrs. Remington must have taken them in," concluded Marjorie. "Well, they weren't so very ornamental."

"Evidently she didn't take much of a nap," remarked Ethel.

They were surprised, therefore, as they entered the tent, to find their chaperone still asleep on her cot. Naturally inferring that it was Daisy who had looked after their uniforms, they went in search of her. But she too was asleep in her tent.

"Let's get dressed first," suggested Marjorie; "and find out about them later. It would be a shame to waken Mrs. Remington—"

"What's this?" called the latter, from within the adjoining tent. "I am awake—I just heard you come."

"Good!" exclaimed Alice. "It certainly was nice of you to take in our uniforms—"

"Your uniforms?" repeated Mrs. Remington, questioningly. "But I didn't touch them! I've been asleep ever since you left!"

"Then Daisy did," said Marjorie. "Oh—O—Dais!"

"Yes?" came a sleepy voice.

"Did you take in our uniforms?"

"No—I've been asleep!"

"But they're gone!" cried Ethel, in dismay.

The girls looked at each other in obvious consternation. This was a catastrophe which they had never dreamed of—and a serious one. For if they travelled in civilian dress they would be breaking one of the regulations that Miss Vaughn had so carefully stipulated.

"What could have happened to them?" demanded Alice, hysterically. "Who would want to steal them?"

"Nobody but a troop of Girl Scouts, and they wouldn't," reasoned Marjorie.

"Or a rag-man!" suggested Ethel.

"And they could hardly blow away," continued Marjorie; "there isn't any wind!"

"Still, we didn't have any clothes-pins," observed Florence, solemnly. "I knew you forgot something, Marj—"

"Come, girls, we'll have to hurry and dress, and do something!" commanded Ethel. "Let's each take a direction and inquire all over the grounds!"

The girls lost no time in carrying out this suggestion; but an hour later they returned without

any information. Mrs. Remington realized how tired and discouraged they were, and urged that all discussion of plans be deferred until dinner.

They went to the same hotel at which they had lunched, and ordered an elaborate dinner. The spaciousness of the dining-room, the calm, leisurely attitude of the other diners, and the delicacy of the food and the service, rested and refreshed them; by the time that the salad course was brought in, they felt ready to consider their disaster and to plan a way out. Marjorie was the first to offer a solution.

"Of course we can't buy new uniforms, since this is Friday night, and the stores are closed all day Saturday; but can't we borrow some from another troop? There must be Girl Scouts in Salt Lake City."

This idea, however, did not meet with instantaneous approval. Several of the girls looked doubtful, and Florence laughed harshly.

"Marj, have you forgotten that we're grown-ups?" she demanded. "And that most Girl Scouts are ten or twelve years of age! Their suits would come to our knees!"

"We could let out the hems—and select the longest ones," protested Marjorie. "It could be done."

"Yes," said Mrs. Remington thoughtfully, "and I

think it is the *only* thing that could be done to save us. We'll have to find the nearest troop."

"There ought to be some of them meeting tonight," remarked Alice. "Friday is usually popular."

"But how to find them?"

"We won't give up till we do! We'll ask everybody we see!"

In spite of the opposition at first, the plan was adopted, and as soon as the meal was concluded, the girls hastened to try it out. It proved to be much less difficult than they had anticipated; the very first person of whom they inquired—the clerk at the hotel desk—told them that his daughter was a Girl Scout, and that her troop met on Friday evenings. Marjorie and Ethel both wrote down the directions he gave them for finding its meeting place.

Without even waiting to return to their camp, the girls set out immediately on their quest, which led them to a remote part of the city, off the main roads. Carefully following their explicit directions, they pulled up at last in front of a little church, and saw by the light in the basement that a meeting was in session.

In less than a minute the girls were out of both cars, running down the steps to the entrance. The door was open and the scouts, who happened to be seated in patrols, and busy with some kind of

hand-craft, looked up excitedly as the girls filed in. The captain came forward smiling.

In a few words, but with infinite tact, Mrs. Remington told the story and put forth her plea for their help. She offered, of course, a good price for the uniforms—sufficient to compensate the scouts for the bother of purchasing new ones. To the travellers' intense relief, the scouts accepted the proposition immediately.

"Of course we are glad to help our sister scouts," replied the captain. "But do you think the uniforms will be long enough?"

"Have you a senior patrol?" inquired Mrs. Remington.

"Yes—girls over fourteen!"

"Well, let us try them. Could the girls run home and get some other clothing?"

"Why certainly," agreed the captain, nodding to the scouts to go. "Run along quickly!"

"Wait!" interposed Marjorie. "We have two cars out there! We can drive you and save time."

"But it's hardly more than across the street," replied the patrol leader graciously. "And we'll only be a minute."

Hardly were they out of the door before they returned to the room.

"Didn't you say that you had *two* cars?" asked the patrol leader, addressing Marjorie.

"Yes. Why?"

"There is only one out there now!"

"Which one?" demanded Lily, in alarm.

"A big one—seven passenger!"

"And mine is gone?" gasped the distressed owner.
"You are sure?"

Alice suddenly let out a shriek.

"It's all my fault, Lil—I forgot to lock it, in my
haste to get in! Oh, I'm so sorry—"

"Will you want our uniforms just the same?" in-
terrupted the patrol leader, realizing that time would
now be too precious to waste.

"Yes," replied Marjorie with determination.
"This doesn't alter our desire to win. We'll go at it
even harder—"

The patrol leader did not wait to hear the end of
the sentence, but hurried her girls back for their
dresses, while the tourists rushed out to make sure
that the other car was safe.

"We can still finish our trip in the one big car,"
said Mrs. Remington, "provided that we put out all
our camping outfit, and stay at hotels every night
till we reach the coast."

"Then let's give our camping things to this nice
little troop," suggested Lily, who had decided to
accept her loss philosophically.

"And start tomorrow instead of waiting over an-
other day," added Marjorie.

Half an hour later the girls dressed again in the scout uniforms, the fit of which was better than they had anticipated, all got into the big car and waved goodbye to their new friends, reminding them to come to the grounds early in the morning for the outfit. They drove back to their tents, somewhat subdued in spirits; the victory in gaining the suits was balanced by the defeat in losing the car. But, as Ethel reminded them, there was one compensation: for the rest of the trip they could all travel together!"

CHAPTER XII.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD.

CALIFORNIA at last!

To most of the girls, who had never been farther west than Wyoming, this state, with its renowned climate and its beautiful scenery, appeared even lovelier than they had pictured it. The mountains and canyons, the wonderful Yosemite Valley with its tall trees; the great stretches of smooth road, seemed like heaven after the desert. For a time the travellers forgot their losses, their anxiety, and even their rewards in their admiration of the country.

It was Marjorie who first brought their thoughts back to the practical side of life.

"Girls, how many of you would be willing to keep on going for a couple of hours after supper? It doesn't get dark for a good while, and since we haven't any camp to pitch, we might as well make use of every minute. We can't afford to waste any time, you know!"

"That's a splendid idea!" cried Ethel. "Only one

thing I beg—let's be sure to get the car into a garage for the night!"

"Maybe we better insure it," suggested Lily. "For if this one were stolen, we would be left."

"We wouldn't be left," returned Ethel. "Because we'd manage to get there somehow, even if we had to hike!"

"But then we wouldn't earn our automobiles!"

"So we'd have to walk back," concluded Marjorie. "Well, girls, we'll see to it that we don't lose this car. Now—to go back to my first suggestion, what do you say to a little ride after supper?"

To her joy she found all the others heartily in favor of the proposition; so after a good substantial meal, they set off again in the early twilight.

"How long shall we drive?" asked Alice, who was taking her turn at the wheel.

"Till about nine o'clock I should suggest," said Mrs. Remington. "The first good-looking hotel after that—"

"With a garage!" put in Lily.

"Yes, with a garage. At least if we find that we can secure rooms. And if we can't, we'll drive on."

"Just as long as we don't have to drive all night," remarked Marjorie. "Like that night we met the woman and the sick child."

"The child that wasn't sick, you mean," corrected Alice.

The girls drove along merrily; indeed, it seemed almost as if the theft of the smaller car had not been a misfortune, so enjoyable it was never to be separated. They watched the sun set beneath the horizon; then, in a few minutes, the cars which they passed began to show lights, and they realized that evening was coming on. A little after dark they came to a broken piece of the road where a detour was necessary. Alice stopped short in time to let the girls make a decision.

"Shall we go on?" she asked.

"It just depends," observed Marjorie, "upon how far the detour lasts. If it keeps up off the main road for a good distance, I should say that we had better turn back to that hotel we just passed."

"No! No!" protested Alice. "Don't let's do that —when time is so precious!"

"But if we don't know where we are going—" objected Lily.

"On! On!" cried Florence, dramatically. "We want to get to the coast!"

"And what care we for danger?" challenged Alice.

A daring spirit of adventure seemed to have taken possession of the little party, for they one and all agreed that they wanted to press on. Alice gladly turned to the wheel again, and released her brakes.

They continued on the same road for about fif-

teen minutes; all the while the cars which they passed became fewer and fewer, and the road more narrow and rough. Then they began to look anxiously for detour signs, or for a hotel; but neither appeared. Finally Alice declared that she knew that they were lost.

"Here's a building with a light—let's stop here and inquire!" she suggested. "Probably they can direct us back to the Lincoln Highway."

"But we won't all go in and leave the car alone this time," remarked Florence, with a significant glance at Alice. "The same thief might come along again!"

"I'll go and ask," volunteered Mrs. Remington. She disappeared into the building, and the girls fell to discussing their misfortunes, and the possibility of regaining any of their lost property. They had reported the theft of the Rolls-Royce at Salt Lake City, but they hardly expected to hear of it again; the food and the uniforms they counted as gone forever.

The conversation dragged, for the girls were growing tired; they could think of nothing but their desire to find lodging for the night. They began to look impatiently for Mrs. Remington.

"I do wish she'd hurry!" yawned Florence. "I'm beginning to feel pretty sleepy!"

"If only we had our camping outfit!" mourned Alice. "We could go to bed right here!"

"Girls, Mrs. Remington is coming out now!" Marjorie informed them. "Look—and some children are with her!"

"These girls don't know a thing about the Lincoln Highway," said Mrs. Remington when she reached the car, "but they are so anxious to hear something about the Girl Scouts that I thought maybe we could go in and let them see our uniforms, and do a little signalling—"

"But we're dirty, and tired," grumbled Florence. "We can give them the Headquarters' address—"

"Do a good turn daily!" murmured Alice, under her breath.

"We'll be delighted!" announced Marjorie, immediately. "At least, if you girls can assure us of finding some place to stay for the night."

"Oh, somebody will surely take you in!" their leader told them. "There is a boarding house about half a mile up the road."

"Then let Lily and me stay and watch the car," urged Florence. "The rest of you go in—we don't dare take any chances!"

Putting aside their own sense of fatigue, the girls followed the children back to the building, and gave them a thorough demonstration of scouting, explaining as they proceeded. Their audience was

thrilled; with shining eyes they followed every detail, and showed such intense gratitude that the girls forgot all about their weariness.

It was after ten o'clock when they finally left the building and climbed into the machine once more. Florence had turned it around, and sat at the wheel in readiness. They all felt that it would be best to get back to the Lincoln Highway again, and there hunt for a place to spend the night, instead of risking the unknown boarding-house the children had mentioned.

It was not, however, such an easy task as they had hoped; in the darkness they failed to recognize any of the land-marks which they had noted in the twilight, and because of the roughness of the road they were forced to proceed slowly and carefully.

"I think we have passed it," remarked Florence, after they had been driving for some time.

"But we couldn't have!" protested Alice. "Even in the dark we would be able to see any road crossing this."

"Then we've strayed on to another road. I'm sure we weren't so far from the highway; we should have crossed it long ago."

"And I'm sure there was no road leading from this that we could stray into," insisted Alice.

"Then why don't we come to it?"

"Maybe Aunt Emeline had it moved back a few miles, just to annoy us," suggested Ethel.

"I think you're all wrong," said Lily. "I've noticed before, when driving at night, that if you're looking for a road it always seems farther away."

"Lily's right," agreed Marjorie. "Of course we came out lots faster than we are going back; we could see the ruts then and avoid them. Don't you think so, Captain?"

"Very likely," answered Mrs. Remington. "I do think we're on the right road, and we'll reach the highway if we only keep on going."

"I see a light ahead!" announced Ethel, who was sitting in front with Florence.

"So do I!" said Lily. "Two lights!"

"That's an approaching car!"

"At least we can ask for directions," declared the ever-ready Marjorie. "Pull over to the right, Flos, and stop when they get to us."

They could see by the bobbing of the lights that the other car was approaching at a pretty rapid pace, regardless of road. In another moment it was upon them, but showed no signs of turning out.

"Now!" cried Marjorie; and Florence swung the car sharply to the side of the road and applied the brakes.

"Just in time to avoid a collision," growled Lily. "Where do they think they are driving like that—"

But even as they stopped, the other car came to an abrupt halt too, a few yards ahead of them, the brakes screeching shrilly in the night.

With the full glare of the other car's head-lights in their eyes, the girls could just make out the two figures which descended from the machine.

"Can you tell us, please," called Marjorie, "whether this road will take us to the Lincoln Highway?"

The answer, when it came, was like a thunder-bolt out of a clear sky.

"Hands up!" ordered a rough voice; and two men approached.

The girls were thrown immediately into helpless, speechless panic. So great was their consternation that they even failed to do as the man commanded. "Hold up yer hands, I say!" he roared, advancing to the side of the car, threatening them with a revolver.

Obediently, seven pairs of hands were elevated.

"Ye Gods! Bill," called the ruffian to his companion. "'tain't nothin' but a carload of girls!"

"Easy pickins, I'll say!" remarked the other.

The men now stood revealed in the gleam of their own headlights. They were clad in soiled overalls and jumpers, and looked like ordinary mechanics, except for the masks which covered their faces completely—rudely improvised masks consisting of

nothing more than pocket handkerchiefs with eye-holes cut in them. But they looked weird enough, and it was no wonder the girls were frightened.

"Ladies," said the man with the gun, who seemed to be the leader, "we hate to disturb you, and all that sort of thing, but we're badly in need of ready cash. So I just guess you'll have to oblige us with some."

"You mean you want to steal our money?" cried Daisy.

"Yes, dearie, if you have t' put it that way. Shell out's the word," replied the man, laughing.

With a sigh of resignation, Mrs. Remington lowered her hands long enough to produce her purse, which she dropped reluctantly into the outstretched hands of the bandit, and the girls followed her example. Marjorie was among the last to surrender her purse. After the first moment of surprise, she had quickly recovered her wits, and was casting about for some method of escape; for she noticed that the man with the revolver failed to keep them covered with it when he saw that they were all girls, and had even replaced the gun in his pocket.

"If I can only get hold of my revolver without arousing his suspicions, I'll have the drop on him, and make him give the money back. The other man

won't dare do anything for fear I'll shoot his companion."

These thoughts flashed through her mind with lightning rapidity, and she determined to take a chance. Under pretence of reaching for her purse, she calmly directed her hand to the pocket where she always carried her revolver, a gift from John Hadley. Alas, the pocket was empty! Then she recalled having put it away in her bag the day they had washed their uniforms. It galled her exceedingly to hand over her purse without resistance. If only Jack and John were with them! But she realized that it was useless to think of resistance now. She could not help saying, however, as she submitted like the other girls:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—two men robbing a party of girls!"

"We are, dearie, we are. It almost breaks our hearts. In fact, you'd better hand over your jewelry to console us!"

"We haven't anything but our watches," replied Mrs. Remington, quietly. "Girl Scouts in uniform don't wear jewelry."

"Wal, fork 'em over!" ordered their persecutor.

Each scout slipped off her wrist-watch and handed it to the bandit. The man surveyed the articles sullenly, and seeming satisfied returned to his own car. His companion had already started

the engine, and without any other words they drove past the girls and sped away into the darkness.

The girls' tongues were loosened now; they all began to talk at once. Anger was the predominating sentiment—anger at being so taken in; but there was also relief at being freed with their lives.

"A pretty pair of cowards!" snapped Marjorie.

They all turned naturally to Mrs. Remington for the solution of their problem.

"We have some travellers' checks in our trunk," she said.

"Well, we needn't say a word about paying at the hotel until tomorrow," said Ethel. "Luckily, hotels aren't pay-as-you-enter-contrivances. We can settle later."

"That's so!" exclaimed Marjorie, joyfully. "But are you sure that we have enough money to get us to San Francisco?"

"Yes, I'm sure," replied the older woman.

Florence started the car again, and they turned their attention to watching for the Lincoln Highway. It was not long before they spied the detour sign in the distance, and knew that a hotel was not far off.

"Here we are!" cried Marjorie, after they had proceeded about half a mile. "Here—on the right!"

"But it's closed!" protested Florence.

"So is most everything now," put in Lily. "It must be nearly midnight.

"Yes, we'll have to rouse them," said Mrs. Remington. "Marjorie, come on out with me while we see."

It was another fifteen minutes before they were rewarded with an answer.

"Yes, we can put you up," replied the proprietor sleepily, "but we haven't any room in the garage for your car!"

The girls, who had all heard this reply, looked at each other despairingly.

"Our car is the only thing we have left!" wailed Alice; "we've been robbed of food, and clothing, and jewelry, and money—"

"And another car," added Lily.

The proprietor regarded them sympathetically; if what they said was true, they certainly had been having a rough time.

"You must have enemies," he remarked. "Nobody could have all those misfortunes just by chance!"

"But we haven't any enemies!" protested Alice. "Only some bootleggers whom we prosecuted last year—and they're in jail!"

"Well, I am sorry for you," the man concluded; "and I guess I can find a safe place for your car

under my shed. Only, if the place burns down I'll lose my insurance—but I guess I'll take a chance. You look pretty tired!"

They put the car away where he indicated, and crept wearily up the stairs to their rooms. The little clock that Mrs. Remington kept in her suit-case informed them that it was one o'clock in the morning—the beginning of a new day, the thirtieth of July. Yet they went to bed with a sense of victory in their hearts; they still possessed one car, and enough money to get them to their destination. Moreover, two days remained to complete their trip to the coast!

CHAPTER XIII.

"FOLLOW THE LEADER."

WHEN the Girl Scouts went to sleep that night, they had every intention of making the usual start at eight o'clock in the morning. Yet Mrs. Remington did not feel justified in asking to be called; they were all tired-out, and needed what sleep they could get. Moreover, she did not anticipate any real delay.

The surprise was therefore very great when Marjorie awakened to hear the town clock striking twelve. One glance at Lily told her that her companion had scarcely stirred during the night; a shout into the adjoining room assured her that the other girls were still in bed.

An overpowering sense of calamity hovered over her until she was able to recall the events of the previous night, and remembered that they had been robbed of all their ready cash. Just as she was about to arouse Lily, Mrs. Remington softly entered the room. Instantly Marjorie discerned that something further was wrong:

"What is it, Mrs. Remington?" she asked without any ceremony.

"My travellers' checks are gone," replied her visitor, with a slight tremor in her voice. "I did carry them in my satchel, but yesterday I remember that I transferred them to my purse. And of course I handed that over to the bandits!"

Instead of being alarmed at this piece of information, Marjorie looked immensely relieved.

"That's all right!" she exclaimed, gleefully. "It'll be a good joke on the thieves, for we'll telegraph the bank to stop payment—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Remington. "All well and good. But that won't help us now. We haven't any money!"

"Oh, horrors!" gasped Marjorie, looking from Lily to Mrs. Remington in distress.

"Don't you suppose somebody will cash an ordinary check?" asked Lily, hopefully.

"Nobody knows us here. No, there is no chance except from the bank. We could wire home for money—" Mrs. Remington stopped abruptly, a cloud crossing her brow. "But we can't do that till Monday—for all the banks close at noon on Saturday."

"Oh!" wailed Marjorie; "now we are in for it! And we have to be at Aunt Emeline's by midnight on Monday."

"We can't possibly!" cried Lily, bursting into tears, an act which summoned the other scouts from the adjoining rooms and necessitated a restatement of the facts as they now stood.

"Maybe the proprietor of this hotel will cash a check for us," suggested Alice, optimistically.

"He might; but I don't think he would unless we had some means of identification," said Ethel. "No, I guess we may as well make up our minds to stay until after nine o'clock on Monday morning."

"Nevertheless we can approach the man on the subject," Marjorie remarked. "He can't do any worse than refuse."

"He might put us out," said Lily.

With all possible celerity, Mrs. Remington left the room to put the proposal to a test. When she returned in fifteen minutes the girls knew instantly by her expression that she had been unsuccessful. However, the proprietor had extended them the courtesy of an invitation to remain as long as they wished.

"Then," concluded Alice, "we have to stay over Sunday, and trust to luck that we can make Aunt Emeline's in one day. Let's don't worry any more —there's simply nothing to be done!"

But Marjorie and Mrs. Remington decided to leave no stone unturned in their attempt to raise money. First of all they went to the police authori-

ties with a full report of their misfortune; then they sought the president of the local bank, a Mr. Simpson, at his own home. Here they were received graciously, not only by the man himself, but by his wife as well, and into their sympathetic ears they poured their disconcerting tale. Neither seemed to doubt its authenticity for a single instant.

"I can't do anything for you in the bank's name," the president informed them when the story was finished, "but I will be glad to help you personally. It won't inconvenience me in the least!"

"You can telegraph our bank at home, and get a reply on Monday," Mrs. Remington suggested.

"I don't need any further proof of your honesty," answered Mr. Simpson, with a kindly smile; "your faces and your uniforms are sufficient!"

Marjorie unceremoniously let out a shriek.

"But we can't accept help from you—splendid as it is of you to offer it!" she objected. "Because our rules forbid us!"

"What rules?" asked the man, in amazement.

Marjorie hastened to make the necessary explanation; and although Mr. Simpson protested that he was not to be classed as "a man along the road," the girl stuck to her resolution.

"We don't want to leave a loop-hole of uncertainty," she said; "we can't be too careful—it might disqualify us."

"Then I positively can't do anything to help you?" he inquired, in obvious disappointment.

"No, you can't, dear," replied his wife, quietly. "But—" she beamed all over her face, for she had taken a fancy to Marjorie—"but I can, and will!"

"Oh, thank you!" cried the girl, jumping up in joy. "And let's settle down to business right away —for there isn't a moment to be lost!"

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Marjorie and Mrs. Remington finally left his house; too late, of course, to consider beginning to drive that night. They hurried back to the hotel and found three of the girls waiting for them on the porch. Daisy and Florence were missing.

As soon as Mrs. Remington had told her story she inquired for the other two girls. Lily and Ethel exchanged amused glances, and Alice informed her that they had discovered some friends at the hotel and had gone for a walk with them.

"Friends!" repeated Marjorie. "Then they could probably have helped us out on the money question!"

"Yes, I believe that they offered to," remarked Ethel indifferently. "But I'm glad we don't have to accept their assistance."

"What's the matter?" demanded Marjorie. "Who are they?"

"Three guesses!"

"Not those young men who own that red racer?" she asked, almost contemptuously.

"The very same," laughed Alice.

"How did they get here?" inquired Mrs. Remington.

"I don't know—except that their car brought them," returned Ethel.

"They certainly do follow us!" exclaimed Marjorie. "And I tell you what," she added emphatically, "I'm getting sick of them! Every time that there is a misfortune, they are on hand. Something else will probably go wrong now!"

"Something else has gone wrong," answered Lily. "I wanted to move the car out to have it washed, and I found that there was water in the carburetor. I mentioned it to the young men, and they wanted to fix it—"

"You didn't let them?" interrupted Marjorie sharply.

"Mercy no! If we lose our rewards I want it to be for reason which we couldn't help—not because we were weak enough to accept assistance from men."

"Here they all come!" announced Alice, suddenly.
"The girls look happy enough!"

"Too happy!" growled Marjorie. "Well, I'm going in—I don't care about meeting these men again."

Just as she disappeared within the doorway of the

hotel, the four young people mounted the porch steps.

"Perhaps we could help you," suggested McDaniel, graciously, after he had paid his respects to Mrs. Remington. "But if we do, we want to exact a promise!"

"Yes?" queried Mrs. Remington.

"You all stay here over tomorrow morning and don't start until after dinner. Then we'll advance you enough money to get to San Francisco!"

Ethel's lips curled ever so imperceptibly.

"Many thanks, Mr. McDaniel," she said, coldly, without waiting for Mrs. Remington to speak; "but we already have secured what funds we need from the president of the bank. And," she added maliciously, "we are starting at seven o'clock tomorrow morning!"

Both men looked crest-fallen at her words, and McDaniel turned imploringly to Mrs. Remington.

"Please stay just till after dinner tomorrow!" he begged. "We had made such a thrilling plan—"

"As thrilling as winning seven automobiles?" interrupted Ethel, sarcastically.

Neither man made any attempt to answer this question, and Ethel left the porch to join Marjorie. Finding her up in her room, she settled herself to repeat the foregoing conversation.

"Marj!" she cried, her eyes still flashing with

anger at the effrontery of the young men, "do you know that I almost believe those people are in league against us. They just seem bent on delaying us whenever it is possible!"

"Yes, indeed," replied Marjorie, "I have been thinking that all along. Just wait till we get to San Francisco! Then I'm going to question Aunt Emeline pretty closely about it. If she has been mean enough to employ them—"

"Oh, well, we'll win out anyhow, in spite of everything!" Ethel asserted triumphantly.

"And we won't take their advice about roads, either!" said Marjorie. "We won't repeat our experience in Chicago!"

There was no need, however, to worry about which road to take, for the Lincoln Highway was in the best condition and stretched before them straight to the coast. They travelled all day Sunday, taking the precaution to select a hotel before sun-down. One day only remained before the stipulated time should expire; yet the girls felt confident that they could reach Miss Vaughn's house before midnight of the first of August.

They awoke early on the morning of their last day, eager to complete their long journey, and to receive their rewards. It was with a sinking sensation that they saw rain-drops on windows, and clouds in the sky, but they had no intention of al-

lowing the weather to defeat them. Deciding to proceed cautiously rather than too speedily, they made their way across the country to the city that is the gateway of the west. The journey was tiresome and somewhat of a strain, in spite of the beautiful scenery, but it was successful. At six o'clock that evening they reached the center of the city.

"We can't walk in at this time of the night and surprise Aunt Emeline," said Marjorie. "So hadn't we better go to a hotel for supper, freshen up a bit, and telephone to her that we are on our way?"

"Then she could give us explicit directions about how to get there," put in Alice.

"Are you sure that we have time enough?" asked Ethel. "It takes a long time to eat dinner in a hotel. And midnight tonight—"

"Oh, we have oceans of time!" exclaimed Daisy, laughingly. "All our worries are over now!"

Accordingly they stopped at one of the largest hotels, and Alice went immediately to the telephone booth. What a shock she received when she discovered that Miss Vaughn was not listed!"

"Probably she doesn't want to be bothered with charity solicitors, and keeps her name out of the book," suggested Lily.

"Or perhaps she's too old-fashioned to have a phone," observed Alice, bitterly. "Hard luck for us!"

"And yet she's up-to-date enough to be interested in Girl Scouts," said Marjorie.

"And to present us with motor-cars!" put in Daisy.

"She hasn't yet," remarked Ethel; "and won't if we don't get there before midnight!"

"Well, I always knew that she was as queer as they make 'em," said Alice. "She's awfully old, you know, and though she has made a will in favor of those two nephews, mother says they live in deadly terror lest she'll change it for some whim."

"I believe it!" laughed Marjorie. "She certainly has kept us in fear and trembling for the last few weeks. But I really think that we are going to get the best of her at last!"

At eight o'clock they started on their way again, in the general direction of the suburb in which Miss Vaughn lived. So jolly and gay were the girls that they lost all track of time; only Marjorie and Ethel kept looking anxiously for the big school-house that was to mark their turning. When houses became fewer and farther apart, and the landscape took on the appearance of the country rather than of the suburbs, Marjorie experienced growing apprehension lest they were lost. At last she stopped the car and turned to the others for consultation.

"We're on the wrong track, I'm sure!" she de-

clared; "and I think that we had better go back to the hotel and start again. It's ten o'clock."

"Ten o'clock!" repeated Lily in dismay. "Suppose we waste two more hours! "We'll never make it!"

"I have an idea," continued Marjorie. "We won't take any chances. Two of you girls take a taxi and give the driver the address; then we'll play follow the leader close behind with our machine."

The plan was immediately adopted, and at eleven o'clock they were back at the hotel where they started. Lily and Mrs. Remington were elected to ride in the taxi, which, to the girls' surprise, drove off in the opposite direction from which they had just come. Marjorie turned about and trailed it for about half an hour; then, at precisely twenty-five minutes after eleven, they entered an impressive gateway and drove up the long, winding road which led to the Vaughn mansion. The girls were so awestruck by its grandeur that they almost neglected to pay the taxi driver.

"I've never been in any place so wonderful!" gasped Daisy, as she mounted the steps.

"It looks like the movies," added Ethel. "I hardly expect to find real people—"

"We had better not delay too long," advised Florence, calling them back to the practical. "We have

only half an hour before our time is up, and it may take them that long to answer the bell!"

"Especially if they have gone to bed," remarked Alice.

"But surely they'd wait till midnight!" said Marjorie.

A moment later, in answer to their ring, the door was opened by a butler, and the girls entered the most magnificent house they had ever seen. They believed that at last they were safe from delay and disaster; they had won their goal! The grandfather's clock in the hall struck the half hour as they passed into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPIES.

THE servant who admitted the Girl Scouts that night to the home of Miss Emeline Vaughn did not need to ask who the visitors were. He led them immediately to the drawing-room, where an elderly lady was sitting in a huge, upholstered arm-chair.

The first impression that the girls received of Alice's aunt was of a tiny shrivelled old lady, with very bright, beady eyes, which shone out from beneath her white eyebrows with all the greater brilliancy. It was evident that she was excited, and she gave them a triumphant smile.

"I knew that you'd make it!" she exclaimed, in a shrill, though not a loud tone. "I've been telling the boys all along. Now—which is Alice?"

Her niece stepped forward instantly and gave her a dutiful kiss upon the cheek.

"Let me introduce Mrs. Remington, our chaperone, first of all," the girl said. "And now the scouts. Not that you'll keep us all straight, or remember all our names—"

"Don't you fool yourself!" interrupted the old lady. "I'm not decrepit yet, though I may look it. As it happens, I know all of your names already, and I'll soon put them to the right people."

Marjorie and Ethel exchanged meaning glances at this piece of information. No doubt the woman was clever—clever enough even to cause the obstacles which they had encountered to be put in their way.

"Which one is Marjorie?" she continued. "I understand that she is an officer of your band—or whatever you call it."

"Lieutenant of the troop," replied Marjorie, with a salute.

"Well, sit down now and tell me all about it. I'll send for my nephews—they waited up for you."

The girls did as they were bidden and Mrs. Remington began a brief recital of their experiences. Before she had gone very far, the two young men of the house entered.

They were both typical Americans of the better class; neat, well-groomed, perfectly at ease in any surroundings. Marjorie could not help noticing a certain similarity of appearance to McDaniel and Cryton, a similarity that was due rather to environment than to any special resemblance. It was evident that they too were college men, and not surprising that they should be members of the same

fraternity. For some unknown reason she took a dislike to them.

"We were so afraid that you wouldn't make it," drawled Milton, the older of the two. "And when eleven o'clock struck and still you didn't come, we felt sure you had lost the game."

"And Auntie would have been so triumphant!" added Vaughn. "Because she really didn't want you to succeed!"

"Vaughn Crowell, what a story!" exclaimed the old lady, resentfully. "I'm not the one that didn't want them to succeed!"

"Only that you would get out of buying all those motor-cars," ventured Alice.

"Maybe not, but what good would that have done me? Didn't I promise the whole amount to your fraternity house if the girls didn't succeed? But I'm mighty glad that they have been so plucky!"

"What did you say, Miss Vaughn?" demanded Marjorie, sharply. "That the fraternity would have benefited by our failure?" she glanced significantly at Ethel.

"You weren't supposed to tell that, Auntie!" remarked Milton, rather sheepishly. "It looks rather queer for us!"

"It explains things," said Ethel, coolly. "Because if I understand rightly, Mr. McDaniel and Mr.

Cryton belong to the same fraternity, don't they, Mr. Crowell?"

"Yes—do you know them?" asked the young man carelessly.

"We met them on the way out, more than once—several times, in fact. And each time they seemed bent on delaying us whenever they could!"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Vaughn; "they never heard of Auntie's promise. It was only made jokingly, and never mentioned to anyone."

"No," put in Miss Vaughn, with sincerity, "the boys really haven't seen any college men since the term closed, and I have never even met these two. Now tell me truthfully—are you absolutely sure that you didn't accept help from any men along the road?"

"Absolutely none!" declared Mrs. Remington, with assurance.

"I am glad to hear it," repeated the old lady. "You bring credit to your sex as well as to your organization. Now, suppose that we have something to eat, and go to bed. We can talk about the automobiles tomorrow."

The girls lost no time in obeying her orders, and soon were fast asleep in the big, handsomely furnished rooms of this spacious house. In their dreams they saw themselves driving their little roadsters in their own home towns; for to all of them except

Lily, the prospect of owning their own cars was a novelty.

* * * * *

Having given instructions that the Girl Scouts were not to be disturbed the following morning, Miss Vaughn breakfasted as usual with her two nephews at nine o'clock. After reading her mail, she established herself for a quiet morning on the porch with some books and her knitting, hardly expecting to hear anything further from the young people until luncheon. She was therefore quite surprised when her nephews strolled towards her about eleven o'clock, accompanied by two other young men with whom they had been playing tennis.

"You have met Jo and Ned, haven't you, Auntie?" asked Milton, as they mounted the steps.

"Oh, yes, of course," replied Miss Vaughn, cordially.

The young men all sat down on the steps, while the old lady could not help wondering what was about to happen, and whether there was any particular reason for the visit.

"A pretty hot day for tennis," observed Vaughn, as if to apologize for the halt in the game. "So we thought that we'd take it a bit easy."

"Yes," added the one whom the boys addressed as "Jo"; "we're both out of practice. We've been east all summer."

"Indeed!" observed Miss Vaughn, wondering whether they were fishing for an invitation to meet the girls. If so, why had her nephews not invited them? Seldom did they show such deference to her wishes.

"Did you motor?" she asked, casually.

"Yes, part of the time," replied Ned. "It was great sport—" His voice died down, as if he had something more that he wished to say, yet did not possess the courage to utter it.

"We saw your party of girls along the way," put in Jo. "At least, they must have been the same ones, for they were all in scout uniform, and were evidently touring."

"Yes, I'd like to find out whether they were your Girls Scouts," added Ned, "just for the fun of it. I am sure that I should recognize them immediately—"

"In other words," snapped the old lady sharply, "you are hinting in every way possible for an invitation. Well, I'll gratify you: come to dinner tonight!"

"Oh, thanks," murmured both young men, gratefully.

"But to call your bluff," continued Miss Vaughn, "how would you be able to identify people whom you merely saw in another machine—both probably going at a pretty good rate of speed?"

"But we weren't," objected Ned "Both the girls' cars were stopped, and we went slowly; in fact, we practically stopped, so that we could offer assistance. Both their cars were in hard luck."

"Punctures?"

"Yes—though the big one was fixed before we got there."

"And the little one?" questioned Miss Vaughn, with a triumphant gleam in her eyes. "Those girls turned down your offer for help?"

"Yes, they did," replied Jo, stolidly.

"I knew it! I knew they would!"

"Naturally," muttered Ned. "Very naturally! Those two frat brothers of Milt's were doing it all. We recognized them and beat it pretty quickly. Nobody has any chance with the ladies when they are around!"

Miss Vaughn suddenly sat up very straight in her chair, twirling her rings excitedly.

"What? What was that?" she demanded, in her shrill voice.

Ned and Jo looked at each other in obvious amazement, as if they could not understand the cause of her disturbance, and both the Crowell boys laughed scornfully.

"Let me explain," said Milton, a smile of amusement still playing about his mouth; "my aunt is giving these girls cars for reaching the coast, if

they comply with certain conditions she has made. And one of the most important of these conditions is that they do not accept any assistance from men along the road. She believes that they lived up to their contract; now you two come along innocently with a different story, and knock down their house of cards. Well, that's too funny!" His tone became cynical. "I knew the girls couldn't do it, Auntie! And just think how near they came to putting it over on you!"

By this time Miss Vaughn's anger had reached the breaking point; she rose from her chair and stamped her foot impetuously, in spite of her seventy-odd years.

"You are sure of what you say?" she demanded, hotly.

"Sure of everything except the identity of the girls—and we'll know that when we see them," replied Ned.

A sudden idea flashed into Miss Vaughn's mind.

"You're not in the boys' fraternity—the one that profits by the Girl Scouts' loss?" she asked shrewdly.

"No, certainly not," answered Ned. Why?"

"Nothing!" She seemed to be thinking quickly. She took a few steps towards the house, stopped as if to say something, changed her mind, and went in.

At first it was her intention to rush straight to the girls' rooms, accuse them of the deceit, learn to what extent they had lied, and make all those who had a part in it forfeit their rewards. But a little consideration of the matter caused her to change her mind; after all it would be better to wait until their identity had been established and she was sure of her case.

It was nearly one o'clock when the scouts, refreshed by their sleep and clothed in their pretty dresses which had been sent ahead in trunks, appeared on the porch. They found their hostess alone; the tennis players had long since returned to their game.

"Well, girls," she said cheerily, "how does it feel to rest?"

"Wonderful!" cried Alice, gaily. "Almost too wonderful—for your sake, Auntie! I'm afraid that we'll want to stay here a good while!"

"You're welcome to stay all summer if you like," replied the old lady hospitably. "In fact, you will have to be here some little time before your cars come. I haven't even put in the order yet!"

"Then you didn't expect us all to win them?" asked Ethel.

"No, frankly, I didn't. And I want to be sure that you deserve them before you get them!"

"Then you're not sure yet?" flashed Alice, suspiciously.

"There, don't get so excited, my child!" said her aunt. "You need not worry now—if your conscience is clear. Nor is there, I take it, any hurry. Now let me tell you about the dinner party which I am arranging in your honor for tonight."

Daisy and Florence looked up expectantly, longing to ask whether their friends of the road were included. They wondered, too, whether they had called that morning as they had promised.

Miss Vaughn answered their question before they asked it.

"Mr. Cryton and Mr. McDaniel called this morning, but I sent word that you girls were resting, and invited them to the party tonight. My two nephews will be here, and two young men with whom they have been playing tennis all morning."

"Are they members of this same fraternity?" asked Marjorie, irrelevantly.

"No," laughed the old lady; "they are eastern boys. But they motored across the continent, so they ought to prove interesting to you."

"I am sure they will," murmured Alice, as the party rose to answer the luncheon summons.

The Crowell boys were a little late to the meal, but they entered the room with the same assurance which they had displayed on the previous evening,

and Marjorie found her first feelings of dislike confirmed. As the luncheon progressed, she grew increasingly ill at ease; the beautiful, spacious dining-room, the noiseless servants, the delicious food went by unnoticed. Something was wrong, she knew; she could sense it before she could define it.

She glanced over at Ethel, and recognized the same evidence of distress in her expression. Something in her eyes, too, said, "Trouble Ahead," and Marjorie looked away.

Both girls knew that as yet the cars were still only potential!

CHAPTER XV.

THE ACCUSATION.

As Marjorie dressed for dinner that evening she had a premonition that something unpleasant was about to happen. She had not felt comfortable in this house since her arrival; something about the Crowell boys made her uneasy in their presence; she could not define her reasons, but she longed to get away.

"How long do you think that we ought to stay?" she inquired of Ethel, as she clasped the buckle of her ecru slipper.

"Not a minute longer than we have to, to be polite," returned her room-mate. "I don't care much for Aunt Emeline, and less than nothing for the nephews."

"But out of deference to Alice, we must be courteous."

"Yes, naturally. And—we must wait to receive our motors!"

Marjorie looked up sharply. Was it possible that Ethel too shared her apprehension?

"You don't think that there is any danger of our not getting them?" she asked.

Ethel half closed her eyes and looked thoughtfully into space. To another girl she would not commit herself, but with Marjorie she felt safe.

"Well, I haven't any reason to doubt the old lady," she said, "and yet somehow I won't believe in those automobiles till I see them!"

"But why?" insisted Marjorie. "Don't you think that she has the money?"

"Oh, yes! But she has two scheming nephews who hate to see her part with it for anyone but themselves."

"Still, it's too late to do anything now. A promise is a promise."

"I hope so!" sighed Ethel, as she finished her toilette.

The girls left their room and descended to the porch. They found most of the other guests already assembled—among them Vincent Cryton and Clyde McDaniel.

"We are glad to see you so soon again," remarked McDaniel pleasantly as he shook Marjorie's hand. "We are in luck."

Marjorie smiled coldly; she detested the way in which these young men bobbed up at every possible opportunity.

"And you really made your trip according to all

regulations, and have earned your rewards!" exclaimed Cryton. "Let me congratulate you!"

"You better not congratulate us too soon," put in Ethel, somewhat bitterly. "We haven't received the cars yet." She glanced slyly at Marjorie and then at Miss Vaughn, who sat with her lips tightly closed and with anything but an amiable expression upon her face. Surely she was right: something was going to happen!"

"But we're going to order them tomorrow!" laughed Daisy, reassuringly. "And I'll take you for a ride in mine the first thing, Clyde!"

"Thanks!" murmured the young man, gratefully.

"You'd risk your life to her, then, McDaniel!" teased Vaughn Crowell.

"The girls were all experienced drivers by now," returned McDaniel, haughtily. "So I do not feel that I am taking any risk!"

"So long as they don't have to fix punctures!" put in Milton Crowell, sarcastically.

"Oh, we can even do that!" Florence asserted proudly. "Just ask Clyde or Vincent—they know!"

"Indeed we do!" cried both boys eagerly; and again Marjorie noticed that Miss Vaughn retained her stolid, expressive silence.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the other two guests of the dinner party—Jo

Wallace and Ned Hitchens—and the gathering was complete. A moment later the butler announced dinner.

Marjorie found herself sauntering rather listlessly into the dining-room, with no great anticipation for the little party. A wave of homesickness spread over her as she took her seat between Clyde McDaniel and Jo Wallace; she wished so much that John Hadley or Dick Roberts, or her brother were beside her, instead. For once in her life she felt absolutely bored; she wondered what in the world she would find to talk about to either of the young men.

To her surprise, however, she found that it would not be necessary to make much conversation, for McDaniel had eyes for no one but Daisy, who sat on his left, and Wallace became at once deeply engrossed in his hostess. So Marjorie had plenty of time to look about her, and to think things out. During the progress of the whole six-course dinner, which was as elaborate as any she had ever attended, she knew that she did not experience a really enjoyable moment.

Yet when she analyzed her discontent, she could not trace it to any happening in the past or present; the girls had, it was true, encountered unusual obstacles during their trip; but they had surmounted them all. Moreover, everything here was absolutely

perfect; she felt that she ought to be enjoying the ease and the luxury of it all to the fullest extent. But still she was not happy.

As she shifted her gaze about the softly lighted table from one smiling group to another, she realized suddenly that the merriment was forced rather than spontaneous; that with the exception of Daisy and Florence, who were thoroughly enjoying McDaniel's and Cryton's society, the guests were not congenial. The other four young men were not of the type which had always appealed to the scouts, and no one was quite at ease.

"It's all due to those Crowell boys," she concluded, as the dessert was brought on. "We don't like them, or their friends, or their influence over Miss Vaughn. If anything does go wrong, it'll be their fault!"

It had always been the hostess's habit to comply with the English custom of having the ladies withdraw from the dining-room first, leaving the young men alone to finish their cigarettes. Accordingly she arose, nodding to the girls to accompany her; but from the very manner in which her request was given, Marjorie sensed that something portentious was about to transpire.

Instead of leading her guests to the porch or the reception-room where they had naturally expected the party to be continued, she conducted them off

to a wing of the house and opened the door into a charming little study that was evidently all her own. More than one of the girls were impressed with the antiques, the tapestries, the paintings, and yet for some unknown reason no one ventured to voice her admiration. Miss Vaughn seated herself at the carved chair at the desk, and the scouts dropped quietly into seats about the room.

"Girls," she began slowly, allowing her glance to travel from one to another in turn, "I have something to tell you that pains me very much. You know that when I suggested this trip, I gave you certain conditions which I wanted you to fulfill, and I put you on your honor in reporting about them. I had to take your word for your statements, for I did not have any thought of finding out for myself. You are Girl Scouts, your first law is trustworthiness; that was enough for me."

"Yet, entirely by accident, I learned, since you have been here, that my trust was misplaced, that two of your number have lied to me!"

She paused for a moment, and caught the varied expressions on the girls' faces—registering anger, incredulity, surprise, resentment, and even distress. But she did not allow anyone to speak.

"Now I want to hasten to assure you that I am not blaming the girls to whom this does not apply; for, as far as I can learn, it was done without the

knowledge of the rest of the party. And of course both the captain and the lieutenant of the troop are blameless; the deceit was kept successfully from them.

"But what in the world—?" began Alice impetuously; but she was waved to silence by a gesture from her aunt.

"One moment, Alice; I'm not finished. I want to repeat that I heard all this inadvertently, from two people who had no interest in you one way or the other, and who knew nothing of the conditions I had made regarding the receiving of help from men along the road. These tourists actually saw two young men—whom I now suppose to be Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton—fixing the tires of the car that was stolen!"

"That's a lie!" cried Florence, jumping from her chair, her eyes blazing with the anger which she could no longer control. Daisy, on the other hand, began to weep.

Marjorie and Ethel looked at each other in blank amazement wondering, for an instant, whether the accusation could possibly be true. Yet they wavered only a moment in doubt; one glance at the girls' righteously angry expressions assured them of their innocence.

"But didn't these young men offer to fix your tires?" persisted Miss Vaughn, shrewdly.

"Yes, of course they did; but we wouldn't let them," answered Florence. "I'll admit we did hesitate for a second—Dais and I were pretty tired, you see—"

"Exactly!" interrupted Miss Vaughn triumphantly. "You see you have given yourselves away, Miss Evans! Of course Mr. Cryton and Mr. McDaniel would never have told — they were too chivalrous for that—but since other people saw you, it is fortunate that the thing came to my ears, before it was too late, and dishonesty was rewarded. Now I am perfectly willing to live up to my part in the bargain—"

"May I ask," interrupted Mrs. Remington, "who your informers are? Are you sure that they are to be trusted?"

"My informers are Mr. Wallace and Mr. Hitchens, and they are to be trusted because they are absolutely disinterested parties."

"And would you take their word ahead of that of Girl Scouts?" flashed Ethel.

"In this circumstance I would. Now, as I said before, I have no intention of punishing the innocent girls with the guilty ones. Tomorrow the rest of you may come down to the sales rooms and order your machines."

There was silence for a moment while the girls tried to control their anger, and to remember that

their accuser was not only their hostess, but an aged lady as well. Marjorie, who knew that the sympathy of the whole group was with the two unfortunate girls, decided to take it upon herself to speak for the rest.

"Miss Vaughn," she said with dignity, "it will be impossible for any of us to accept your gifts so long as you feel that you cannot take the word of two of our members. How do you know that we are not all lying?"

"That's perfect nonsense!" cried the old lady. "Still, Miss Marjorie, I admire you for your loyalty to your troop!"

She arose with a finality that forbade further discussion, and invited the girls into the reception-room, whence strains of dance music could be heard.

Daisy, who was still silently weeping over the disgrace of such an accusation, sought Marjorie's hand in sympathy.

"I'm going to take the first train home tomorrow morning," she sobbed. "Even if I have to go alone! I can't stand it a minute longer than necessary—"

"No!" thundered Marjorie, pressing her hand reassuringly. "Please don't, Daisy!"

"But why?"

"Because I mean to stay here till I clear you and Florence of suspicion! And I shall probably need you both to be on hand to do it!"

"How can you?"

"I don't know; but I am positive that you are both innocent, and therefore I am sure I can succeed!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed a voice behind them, and the girls turned about to see a look of real admiration on Miss Vaughn's face. "I sincerely hope you do—I want to be convinced!"

"You will be!" cried Marjorie, triumphantly. "We'll show you that a Girl Scout's honor is to be trusted!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SECOND CHANCE.

As the girls entered the great reception-room where the young men were now waiting for them, it would not have been difficult for an outsider to read from their faces the fact that something unpleasant had happened. The Crowell boys and Wallace and Hitchens, who all instantly guessed at the portent of the interview, could not hide their embarrassment. Both Cryton and McDaniel looked frankly curious. The latter searched the group anxiously for Daisy.

"Where's Daisy?" he asked Florence when he reached her side.

The girl made an effort to control herself before she could answer calmly.

"She and Marj went upstairs for their powder boxes," she replied. "They'll be here in a minute. But can't you find another partner?"

"Where could I find another such partner?" he replied, relinquishing his claim upon Florence to Cryton.

Retiring into the hall, he impatiently awaited Daisy's return. But three dances were over before she put in an appearance, and then she came reluctantly.

"Daisy!" he cried suddenly, as the girls descended the wide stairway. "I'm simply dying to dance!"

The girl dropped her eyes as she came towards him, and Marjorie explained briefly that her companion had a headache. Then she vanished through the doorway, leaving the couple together.

"Something has happened!" exclaimed McDaniel anxiously. "Tell me, Daisy! The girls all seemed to be worked up."

"Come out here on the porch," murmured the girl! "and I'll tell you all about it. Flos and I are in disgrace!"

"In disgrace!" he faltered. "But—but—why?"

Daisy waited until they were seated before she began her story. She related it just as Miss Vaughn had presented it, but as she spoke her voice shook

with emotion, and before she had concluded she was again on the verge of tears.

"You know that it isn't true, Clyde!" she wailed.
"Can't you do something?"

"Of course I'll try!" replied the young man angrily. "The very idea of their bringing such an accusation! But—as you say—I'm afraid they won't believe me."

Daisy looked up through her tears into McDaniel's eyes, but somehow they seemed to lack assurance. Was it possible that he would not come to her aid?

"You know we're innocent!" she protested.

"Yes, certainly I do!" His tone grew irritable, as though he wished to forget the matter. Then, as if to accomplish this, he reminded her that they were missing the dancing.

But Daisy hesitated, still borne down by the sense of shame and disgrace.

"I don't feel like dancing, Clyde!"

"Did the possession of an automobile mean so much to you?"

"No, no! It isn't the loss of the car," murmured the girl. "It's my honor! To think that they actually believe that I lied!"

"But you can't blame Miss Vaughn," he consoled her. "She doesn't know you. Oh, Daisy, if I could only help you—"

"You do help me by believing me."

"Then try to forget it all. Now—will you dance with me?"

But although Daisy consented, and made every effort to put the unfortunate occurrence from her thoughts, she was not very successful, and long before the evening was over she realized that it would be better to give up and go to bed. Perhaps in sleep she could forget her trouble.

Having made up her mind to withdraw quietly from the party, she looked about for Marjorie. To her surprise she found her—not on the floor as she usually was when music was playing—but over in the corner of the room talking with Miss Vaughn. As inconspicuously as possible she made her way across to them. As she drew near enough to hear their voices she realized that Marjorie's was ardent, pleading; she was evidently asking the old lady for something. However, she looked up cordially as Daisy approached, not seeming to mind the interruption.

"Yes—come here, Daisy—I am pleading your cause! I am trying to convince Miss Vaughn that Mr. Wallace and Mr. Hitchens made a mistake."

The woman's eyes searched those of the newcomer, but she could read neither guilt nor innocence from her countenance—only distress.

"But how could they?" asked Miss Vaughn.

"They admitted that they didn't stop," argued Marjorie; "so it might have been rather difficult to determine whether the boys or the girls were doing the work!"

"Why didn't you ask Mr. McDaniel?" suggested Daisy.

"I have already asked Mr. Cryton," replied Miss Vaughn; "and, as I expected, he denied it. He would hardly be a man if he didn't, knowing the circumstances. No, I am afraid that in a case like this, the word of these two young men could not be relied upon."

"Then why rely upon that of the other two men?" flashed Marjorie.

"That is different—they are disinterested, as I told you before. And they gave me the information before they heard of my conditions—not afterwards! Now they too would probably lie for you, out of chivalry, since they know how much it means to you."

As she continued, Marjorie grew increasingly excited, while Daisy only became more and more unhappy. Her eyes sought Marjorie's in a mute appeal for her to take her away from the party. But the other girl was not ready; she had a plan at the back of her mind which she was saving to utilize if all else failed.

"Miss Vaughn," she said, finally, "then I ask

that you give us another chance! That you consent to let these two suspected girls make the trip back, accompanied by a chaperone whom you appoint, who will serve as referee. Give them a chance to prove that they can do it!"

Miss Vaughn listened in surprise, but not with disfavor. It was characteristic of her that she wanted to play fair.

"And if they make it according to conditions?" she asked.

"Then we all receive the cars. If not, nobody does!"

"Would you expect all the girls to make the trip again?"

"No—only Florence and Daisy—and anyone else who wishes," returned Marjorie.

Then Daisy spoke up.

"Please, don't give yourself the trouble of considering such a proposal on my account. I never could consent to such a plan!"

"Why not?" asked Miss Vaughn, rather wearily.

"Pride, I suppose," answered Daisy. "But it wouldn't improve matters any. It wouldn't convince you in the least that we had not lied in the first place; and since you won't believe us, let us say no more about it."

"My dear, I should be only too happy to believe you; in fact, I am more inclined to take people at

their word than otherwise. That is why I believed Mr. Wallace and Mr. Hitchens; and I fully expected you two girls to confess when confronted with the accusation. But you did not; and then I regretted the very foolish outburst on my part, which now places me in the very delicate position that, since everyone knows how matters stand, I can't seem to believe one side without making out the others as liars. I thought to shift the responsibility upon your shoulders by offering you the cars if you would take them under the circumstances. You refused, which is something in your favor, but my position remains unaltered. Yes, it may be that this is a way out, if you will consent to it. That is why I say it is worth considering."

"I think it would be better for everyone concerned if we let the matter drop," repeated Daisy.

"Don't mind Daisy, Miss Vaughn," said Marjorie, as she put her arm about the girl to lead her away. "It's natural for her to feel this way. Consider the proposition as a special favor to me, and to Pansy Troop."

"Well, I will think it over," replied the hostess. "I'll let you know tomorrow morning."

Daisy and Marjorie took the reply as a dismissal, and left the ball room together. When they reached the door of their own room, Daisy questioned Mar-

jorie once more for assurance of her belief in their innocence.

"You don't believe that we did accept assistance, do you, Marj? Tell me again!"

"No, Daisy! A hundred times, no! In fact—I don't even believe that you looked as if you did!"

"But then why would those two boys make such a report?"

"Because there's a mystery that underlies all this! A mystery which I mean to solve, if I possibly can!"

"Could somebody be plotting against us?" asked Daisy, incredulously.

"Yes, I think so. Some of our mishaps may have been accidental, but I'm sure some of them were deliberate. And when you think back, you may remember how many times Mr. Cryton and Mr. McDaniel tried to delay us!"

"Surely you don't mistrust them?" faltered Daisy. "I—I thought that every time they just wanted—"

"Yes," interrupted Marjorie. "I know what you want to say, only you are too modest! You believed that they wished to see more of you and Flos. Probably they did, Daisy; but that wasn't the only reason."

"I'd hate to think that they had anything to do with this!" sighed Daisy. "Flos and I think a lot of them."

"But Jack and John said they didn't consider

them absolutely straight, and hoped that we wouldn't see too much of them this summer," Marjorie reminded her.

"Marj," interrupted Daisy, with a sudden return of the spirit she had displayed in her hostess's presence, "I positively refuse to make that trip back! I don't care enough for the cars to accept them under the circumstances—even if we do win them!"

"Not for the sake of the cars, Daisy; but because we want to clear you and Florence—and save the honor of Pansy Troop!"

"But that wouldn't clear us!" protested the other.

"If you will just be willing to pocket your pride, Daisy, and accept Miss Vaughn's offer—I'll show you that it will be best in the end."

"How could it be?"

"You'll see! I have a little scheme up my sleeve—to set a trap," Marjorie explained; "and try to catch our enemies at their game!"

Daisy's eyes grew big at the thought of the adventure Marjorie must be planning. Could she have a plot, too, then—to catch the boys and prove their trickery, and the girls' honesty? Eagerly she demanded more information.

"Tell me more about it, Marj!" she pleaded.

But Marjorie shook her head.

"I can't, Daisy—it's all too uncertain. But if you and Florence will only trust me enough to accept

the terms of the proposition, I think I may succeed. Would you be willing to place yourself in my hands?"

Daisy looked into Marjorie's animated face, and the old feeling of admiration, of respect, took possession of her, and she knew that she was only too glad to follow such a competent leader. She laid her cheek up against Marjorie's, and in endearing words, murmured her loyalty.

Early the next morning before Marjorie went to Miss Vaughn to learn of her decision, she made it a point to lay the proposition before Florence. Like Daisy, she protested at first, but was won over in the end. No one in the patrol ever resisted Marjorie long, not only because her personality was so compelling, but because her foresight always found a way out of every difficulty. The latter, however, decided to say nothing of her scheme to the other girls until after her talk with Miss Vaughn.

She found her hostess before breakfast in her favorite spot on the veranda, near to the honeysuckle vine.

"Come sit beside me, Marjorie," the old lady said. "I want a little talk with you."

"Yes?" answered Marjorie, trying to hide her impatience.

"I am only too glad to grant your request," continued Miss Vaughn. "It seems to me a very good

solution of the way out of both your problem and mine. And this time everything will probably turn out all right."

"I hope so," agreed Marjorie, concealing the doubts that she felt.

"Now about a chaperone. I think I know of just the right person—a Mrs. Hart, a charming woman, who, I think would be willing to go."

They continued to discuss their plans until the breakfast bell sounded. No sooner was the party gathered at the table than she announced her good news.

"Girls," she said, gaily, "we are to have a second chance! Miss Vaughn has decided to let Daisy and Florence try the trip back again, under the same conditions."

The girls glanced doubtfully at the two who were mentioned, but, seeing that they did not protest, they all expressed their approval.

"But how do we know that someone won't turn up to tell lies this time?" asked Ethel, morosely.

"We're to take a Mrs. Hart, a friend of Miss Vaughn," replied Marjorie, watching the Crowell boys closely to see how the announcement affected them. To all appearances, they were delighted.

"Flos, Daisy, Mrs. Hart, I—and one other girl," she continued. "Who else wants to go?"

"I do!" volunteered Ethel, instantly.

"Agreed!" concluded Marjorie.

"Now," added Miss Vaughn, who was warming more and more to the idea, "to show you how fair I wish to be: if you girls succeed this time, I will leave a considerable sum to the Girl Scout organization in my will. I have no doubt that it is in need of funds?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Marjorie, her eyes sparkling at the thought of so much generosity. She had always dreamed of doing something such as this for the movement, but could never see just how.

Again she glanced at Miss Vaughn's nephews to ascertain how they were taking the announcement, for such a gift would necessarily come out of their inheritance. This time she thought she perceived a sense of irritation which they were making an effort to conceal.

"It would be a wonderful thing to do!" she added. "I would be glad to attempt the automobile trip for that reason, if for nothing else."

"I will even modify it to a safe journey to Lima, where your friend lives," said Miss Vaughn. "If you can reach there—"

"We can! We can!" exclaimed Daisy, rapturously. "And we'll start soon!"

"As soon as your car comes back from the repair shop," concluded their hostess; "inside of ten days—at the latest."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TELEGRAM.

As soon as the girls left the dining-room they one and all made excuses to go to their own apartments. With the exception of Daisy and Florence, whom Marjorie had informed before breakfast, they were all eager to hear of the project in detail.

"Tell us all about it, Marj!" begged Ethel, when they were seated on the attractively furnished screened porch which opened out of Mrs. Remington's boudoir. "We want to hear everything!"

"Well," began Marjorie, "I suppose that the foundation of my plan was laid long ago—when Alice conceived the idea that Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton in their red racer were trying to spy on us. I didn't exactly believe that, but I did wonder whether Miss Vaughn—or Aunt Emeline, as we called her all along—had arranged for obstacles to be put in our way. Then, when we got here, and learned accidentally that her nephews would have benefited by our failure, I began to sus-

pect not only the Crowell boys, but Mr. Cryton and Mr. McDaniel as well."

"Nevertheless," she continued, "I never would have given the matter another thought if we had all received our cars as we deserved."

"You're not logical, Marj!" interrupted Florence. "How can you possibly drag Vincent and Clyde into it, when all they do is to affirm our innocence? These two new men are to blame—and they aren't members of the fraternity that benefits! How do you account for that?"

"Because," answered Marjorie slowly, "I think it's all a frame-up, a plot against us, and I think Wallace and Hitchens were bribed!"

"Oh, no, Marj!" protested Daisy. "Surely not! Not by Clyde—I'm sure of that!"

"But just look back," said Marjorie, "and think over our mishaps. First the puncture due to tacks—scattered by whom?—next the delay at Mae's, and later at Chicago and the directions which led us through the mud; the stolen food and uniforms—"

"Marj!" exclaimed Lily; "surely you couldn't blame the boys for that! They'd never take our clothing!"

"Why not?" demanded Marjorie; "for who else would? And they knew our route, and the conditions of our winning the rewards!"

"And how about the bandits and the poor woman in the desert?" asked Florence, mockingly.

"Well, I'm not sure of them—those were things which are likely to happen to anybody. And yet the boys may have had part in them, for the bandits were masked and you remember that the woman received a one hundred dollar bill at that hotel—perhaps as a bribe!"

"You certainly have an imagination, Marj!" cried Daisy. "I can't believe that!"

"Well, maybe that is too much," admitted the other.

"But tell us how you persuaded Aunt Emeline to give us a second chance," begged Alice.

Marjorie proceeded to relate the conversation of the previous evening, stating that her hostess had only made her decision known that morning. The girls congratulated her heartily upon the brilliancy of the idea, and the success in putting it across.

"But if you believe that all these things were planned against us, do you think that it would be safe to attempt the trip back?" asked Lily. "Wouldn't Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton lie in wait for you again?"

"No, I don't think they would," answered Marjorie. "They are improving under Daisy's and Flos's influence. If we have any interference, it will be from the Crowell boys themselves, for they

won't care about losing this new slice from their inheritance. In fact, I almost believe that if we persist in making the trip, they may resort to drastic measures."

"But you're not thinking of giving it up for that reason, are you, Marj?" asked Lily.

"No, of course not! Can you see me?"

"Well—hardly. Only you really don't want to take any dangerous chances—the trip is enough of a strain without that. And besides, what could you do to protect yourselves?"

"I have a plan."

"Of course you have, Marj!" exclaimed her chum, admiringly. "Don't you always? Do tell us about it!"

"Yes, do!" pleaded two or three of the others.

Marjorie's eyes twinkled mischievously; she loved a mystery.

"Not yet," she replied, "because it isn't formulated. Wait till I send a telegram—"

"A telegram?" repeated Lily.

"Where? To whom?" demanded several of the others.

"To—Chicago!" answered Marjorie, slowly. "But I can't tell you to whom!"

"But who is there in Chicago that could help us?" asked Ethel.

"I'll tell you when I see whether my plan suc-

ceeds," she announced, smilingly. "Until then—it's a secret. Are you all agreed?"

"Certainly!" they all affirmed, with characteristic loyalty.

The ten days that followed were not particularly pleasurable for any of the party. Marjorie, in particular, waited with impatience the day of departure, for a return telegram from Chicago had promised her the assistance she needed. But though the girls were all curious, they, true to their promise, refrained from asking questions.

Miss Vaughn had arranged a picnic for the last day of their visit, and Marjorie, who had other plans for herself and Ethel, although the latter was as much in the dark as any of the others in regard to them, found some difficulty in getting herself and her companion excused. Finally, in view of the fact that the following day would be a strenuous one and that they still had some arrangements to make, they slipped off and took a taxi to the station.

"Are you going to let me into the secret at last?" inquired Ethel, as they left Miss Vaughn's grounds.

Marjorie nodded, gaily.

"You'll know when we get to the station," she replied.

"The station? Somebody is coming?"

"Two somebodies," corrected Marjorie.

Ethel knew that there was no use in plying her companion with questions, for Marjorie was enjoying her suspense. The distance, however, was short, ten minutes later the girls had dismissed the taxi and were hurrying up the station steps. Hardly had they pushed open the door before two familiar figures rushed towards them. It was John Hadley, and Marjorie's brother Jack!

"Hello, Sis!" cried Jack joyously. "We sure are glad to see you!"

"Sh! Jack! Not so loud!" cautioned his sister, enjoying the expression of amazement on Ethel's face. "We're not supposed to be here, and we don't want to be seen or recognized. It's a plot, you know; and it may fall through. We're not even telling the other girls about you."

"A plot?" repeated John, who knew only the brief message of the telegram which called for help. "Tell us about it—"

"Let's go eat somewhere," suggested Jack, "and hear the whole story then."

As soon as they were seated in a cozy little tea-room of Marjorie's selection, and had given their order to the waiter, she told her story from beginning to end, concluding with her suspicions concerning McDaniel and Cryton and the Crowell boys.

"But granted that theory is correct, and they did try to block you on the way out," said Jack; "what

good can we do now? How can we help you at this late stage of the game—?"

"You can help us very materially," answered Marjorie. "Because I expect some sort of attack on the way back. Those Crowell boys are never going to let us have those cars and some of their inheritance without a struggle."

"Then you expect Cryton and McDaniel to hold you up again?"

"No, I think they're out of it. I am looking for trouble from the Crowell boys themselves."

"Couldn't you fool them by taking a different route?" suggested John.

"We might, though I hardly think so," replied the girl. "And besides I would rather catch them and get a confession—it's the only way we'll ever get it. So Ethel and I have been careful to tell Miss Vaughn all the details for the trip in their hearing—"

"Have they said anything, one way or the other?" asked Jack.

"Yes, they've tried to discourage us," answered Ethel. "They've told us of several instances of robberies and hold-ups, and have been warning us of danger."

"And they always tell these stories in front of Miss Vaughn," added Marjorie.

John nodded his head significantly; the case

against the Crowell boys appeared as clear to him as it did to Marjorie.

"And just what do you want us to do?" he inquired.

"Get a machine and follow us, going when we go, and stopping when we stop, but never giving any sign of knowing us. And we'll have a signal—"

"Yes, the scout whistle!" laughed Jack. "Just like last summer!"

"Three blasts!" put in Marjorie.

"Three blasts, and we'll be at your side!" cried Jack, his eyes glowing in anticipation of the adventure. "And what are our chances against these two young men in a hand to hand struggle?"

"Oh, splendid!" exclaimed both girls immediately.

Ethel's face suddenly darkened.

"Marj!" she exclaimed, in distress, "If we accepted help from any boys we'd forfeit our chance of earning the cars!"

"I don't think so," reasoned Marjorie; "not this time. If we caught the Crowells, we'd get a confession that would clear us and prove that we deserved the cars for our trip out."

"And you actually think those boys would go to the extent of attacking girls?" asked John, incredulously. "How would that look?"

"Oh, they'd be masked, or disguised, or some-

thing. They'd do most anything to keep all that money for themselves!"

"And now," concluded Marjorie, unfolding a piece of paper from her hand-bag, "here are your directions and your map. Follow these closely—you see they even give the hotels where we intend stopping—and we shan't see each other to talk to again until the end of the trip, or—if something happens!"

"And won't we feel silly if nothing does happen!" remarked Jack.

"Silly, perhaps, yes," agreed Marjorie, rising; "but the whole Girl Scout movement will benefit, and that is worth while, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," replied John, holding the door open for the girls to pass out. Then, without further delay, they hurried back to Miss Vaughn's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CONVOY.

WHEN the picnickers returned to Miss Vaughn's, they found Ethel and Marjorie waiting for them on the porch. Lily rushed impetuously towards her chum, anxious to find out immediately what she

had been doing in her absence; but Marjorie checked her with a glance towards Miss Vaughn.

"Did you have a good time?" asked Marjorie, carelessly, as if she and Ethel had been at home all afternoon.

"We certainly did," replied Lily, taking the hint. "And have you made all your arrangements satisfactorily?"

"Yes," answered the other. "We haven't so much to buy as we had for our trip out, because we're not planning to do any camping."

"What?" demanded Milton Crowell, in astonishment. "Then you have changed your plans?"

Marjorie drew down the corners of her mouth in amusement at the young man's instant display of interest. Surely she was correct in her surmise that this concern was not prompted by mere idle curiosity!

"Yes—the car would be too crowded if we loaded it up with equipment," she explained. "Besides Mrs. Hart is not keen about it, and we must consider her wishes."

"Naturally," he agreed.

Lily put an abrupt end to this conversation by reminding the girls of their need to retire early in view of the morrow's strenuous program. In reality, she wanted to be alone with Marjorie to see whether she would reveal anything about her occupation.

during the afternoon. But both Marjorie and Ethel refused to divulge the secret.

"You really expect some sort of midnight raid from the Crowells?" Lily asked carelessly, just for something to say.

"To tell you the truth, Lil," replied Marjorie, "I don't know what to expect. Since we're not going to camp out, I can't see just how they can work it. But I feel confident that they'll try something."

"Marj," said the other girl, seriously, "I begin to think that it's sort of dangerous for you even to attempt the trip back. What if they'd shoot you in a lonely place—?"

"Nonsense, Lil! We've got to take some risks. Think what it means to us—to Daisy and Flos—and to the whole Girl Scout organization!"

"And as usual you're ready to defy consequences!" retorted Lily.

"But we always came out all right before, and we surely will now!"

"But we always had the boys to help us," objected Lily.

Marjorie stole a glance at Ethel, but said nothing.

"But perhaps nothing will happen," put in Ethel, in amusement. "After all, the whole thing is only a matter of conjecture."

"Then since you persist in carrying out your plans," announced Lily, "I have decided to go along with you. You've got to pack me in somewhere!"

"No, no, Lily!" protested Marjorie vehemently. "We'd love to have you, but you think that it's dangerous and maybe you're right. Remember you're an only child!"

"You've used that argument before!"

"And it's still true!"

"Well, I'm going, anyhow. Now—listen to this: I haven't made any reservations to go on the train with the others!"

"What?" demanded Marjorie in surprise, realizing for the first time that the girl was in earnest.

"No, I haven't! So you have to take me along with you."

The argument proved conclusive; Marjorie had no idea of subjecting her chum to the weariness of a journey to the east alone. Accordingly, when the party passed the following morning, Alice and Mrs. Remington were the only ones left behind to return by rail.

The seven-passenger car in which they had travelled to the Pacific Coast had been completely overhauled and pronounced by an expert to be in perfect condition for the return trip. But this time not one of the party, except possibly Mrs. Hart,

looked forward to a smooth and uneventful tour. Marjorie even wondered secretly whether they would not all be a trifle disappointed if nothing did happen.

And yet when she thought it over she did not quite see how an attack could be planned. The schedule had been carefully prepared so that there need be no driving at night; each sunset was to find them at some inn or hotel, and the car safely stored for the night in a garage. Whatever took place would have to be planned for broad daylight, and there seemed to be too much traffic to allow any measure of success. Nevertheless she made up her mind to keep a sharp look-out for trouble.

In order to have a change of scenery the girls decided not to take the Lincoln Highway, but to go home by another route. In her shopping tours about San Francisco Marjorie had picked up a very complete book, in which was printed not only a map of the trip, but a description of the best hotels and inns along the way. She had made it a point to purchase two copies, one of which she had marked for Miss Vaughn's benefit. So, if the Crowell boys chose, they could figure out approximately where the party would be at each hour of every day. Lily had reprimanded her for her daring, saying that she was only putting temptation into the young men's way and making things more dangerous for

herself; but with her usual spirit Marjorie had replied that she loved adventure.

But by the time that two days had passed without the slightest accident to disturb their progress, and the Girl Scouts had left the state of California, Marjorie herself began to doubt whether there would be any excitement. On that very day, however, they met with the first noteworthy experience.

It was a hot day; the sun was shining brightly and the road upon which they were travelling was hard and dry. The girls looked in vain for shade; as far as they could see in the distance there was no promise of relief.

"No wonder there are so few cars," remarked Ethel, listlessly. "If I had my choice, I'd rather stay at home today too."

"There must be at least one behind us somewhere," muttered Marjorie, in a tone too low for anyone else to hear. "The boys aren't far away."

"No, replied Ethel. "I think, by the way, that they must have stayed at that hotel across the street from us last night. I think I caught a glimpse of them on the porch when we drove away."

"No doubt you did. Doesn't it seem funny not to wait for them, and speak to them?"

"It must be torture for poor John Hadley!" teased Ethel. "You certainly can be cruel, Marj—"

"Hush, Ethel!" remonstrated the other. "You'll let the cat out of the bag."

"I wonder," remarked Lily, loud enough for the whole party to hear, "whether we wouldn't dare turn aside here at the next cross road. This seems to be shady, and the guide book says that it is all right, and not out of our way."

"I'm doubtful of detours," laughed Marjorie. "Our experience before wasn't so good."

"Oh, there can't be anything like that," said Lily. "Unless you hate to leave the beaten track, I don't see why we shouldn't."

"I'll take a chance!" agreed Marjorie, turning into the cross-road.

Just as the guide-book stated, the route did prove more attractive; but, as Marjorie for some unknown reason suspected, a surprise awaited them. Hardly had they proceeded half a mile before two armed men on horseback suddenly appeared from the brushwood on the side of the road.

"I knew it!" whispered Marjorie, her eyes alight with expectancy. "The Crowells!"

"Never!" whispered Ethel. "They're too old, even to be bribed—"

"We demand a search!" thundered the larger of the two men, peering from under his wide hat right into the startled eyes of the scouts. "Everyone get out, please!"

"A search for what?" faltered Mrs. Hart, her voice trembling with emotion.

"For booze! We are sheriffs of the state of Nevada!"

"Let's see your badge!" challenged Marjorie, fearlessly.

Both men immediately pushed back their coats in amusement, and, to the consternation of all the scouts, displayed their silver stars. Lily gasped in wonder, and Marjorie informally broke into a laugh. It was Mrs. Hart who had to remind them that they must make haste to comply with the command.

"We really don't expect to find boot-leggers among young ladies," apologized the milder of the two officers, "but it's a rule to search everybody."

"Oh, we don't mind a bit!" replied Marjorie. "We're so thankful that you're not bandits or thieves. You see we're used to meeting such people on our way."

"What?" demanded both officers at once. "We thought that these roads were safe for motorists," added one.

"Safe for everybody but us, it seems," explained Marjorie. "On our way out we were robbed of money and food and clothing and a car—"

"At different times?"

"Yes."

"And by different persons?"

"That we don't know," answered Marjorie. "We never caught anybody."

"I should say that you need a detective—or a body-guard," remarked the officer, as he indicated that the scouts should get into the car.

"I guess we have one," muttered Marjorie to herself; for, just as she started her engine, a touring car with two young men passed the car. To the amazement of all but Marjorie and Ethel the girls recognized Jack Wilkinson and John Hadley!

"Am I dreaming?" gasped Lily, "or were they really Jack and John?"

Marjorie and Ethel both laughed heartily.

"The very same," replied the latter.

"But how—?" began Daisy.

Marjorie put her finger over her lips, in warning to the girls not to ask any enlightening questions before Mrs. Hart. The girls took the hint, and though they were sincerely puzzled, kept quiet.

"Don't forget Chicago!" remarked Ethel, enigmatically.

"But why Chicago?" demanded Lily.

"Because John happened to be there on business," Marjorie explained, so Jack went with him, both expecting to use their vacations for a lake trip. John wrote me from there."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Lily, settling back into

her seat with a sigh of relief. For in her subtle manner, Marjorie had conveyed to the girls that they now had protectors.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF THE DRIVE.

As the Girl Scouts entered the dining-room of their hotel the following day they looked anything but jubilant. The trip through the desert loomed up before them, with its tediousness, its ugliness, its dangerous aspect. For, in spite of everything they said to the contrary, they all secretly believed that trouble was in store for them sooner or later. And what place could be more opportune than the barren waste land of the next three states?

It was Marjorie who sensed the general depression of the whole party and made an effort to dispel it. She wished that she might joke about the boys who were following them, but that subject was still to be kept a secret from Mrs. Hart. Instead, therefore, she reminded them of the rewards they were to receive. Her vivacity, however, failed to draw any spark from the others.

"We heard all that before, on the way out," remarked Florence, cynically. "And nothing hap-

pened. Even if we get there safely, Miss Vaughn will find some other excuse to refuse us."

"You don't seem to think much of our worthy benefactor," observed Ethel. "It's a lucky thing that Alice isn't along, to hear such opinions of her aunt!"

"Oh, Alice wouldn't care!" exclaimed Florence.

"But maybe Mrs. Hart does," Marjorie reminded her.

The chaperone smiled knowingly; she was not surprised at the girls' estimate of her friend's character. Indeed, she had not approved of Miss Vaughn's hasty action herself, yet she saw the difficulty of her position.

"No, I don't blame you girls a bit," she assured them. "I think it was mean to take those strangers' words in the first place."

"And you really do believe that we are innocent, don't you, Mrs. Hart?" demanded Daisy, eagerly.

"I certainly do!" replied the older woman. "If I hadn't been certain of it, I never would have consented to come with you, for I can't say that I thoroughly enjoy such a long trip. And then there's the desert—"

"Oh, the desert is all right!" interrupted Marjorie. "We got through it before, and we will this time. Please don't worry, Mrs. Hart."

"No, let's forget it," urged Ethel, falling in with

Marjorie's effort to raise the spirits of the party.
"We're safe for tonight—nothing can happen to us now!"

"I hope not!" sighed Lily, who was never quite at ease.

Long after supper was over the girls sat out on the pleasant porch of the hotel and contemplated the loveliness of the scene, trying, it would seem, to absorb enough beauty to last them during the coming days. Then, as darkness came on they grew more and more quiet until Ethel suggested that they go to bed.

"Did you make sure that the car was safe?" asked Lily, as usual. It was a habit of hers to make such an inquiry each night before retiring.

"Yes," returned Marjorie, laughingly. "The garage-man bolted the big door on the inside, and then let himself out through the office. That's a dead-latch—and he has the only key in his possession."

"We ought to be safe then," remarked Daisy, with a sigh of relief. "Unless the garage burns down!"

"Daisy, how can you suggest such a thing!" cried Ethel. "Wait till we get upstairs! If I don't put your head under the cold water spigot—"

"Just try and catch me!" challenged the other, darting nimbly up the stairs.

But when the girls reached their rooms they discovered that they were too tired to romp; the seriousness of their undertaking, the prospect of the trip through the desert which was before them, dampened their spirits, and they lost no time in getting into bed.

Marjorie had promised to awaken them with her alarm clock, but she found the summons unnecessary. Long before eight, they were all dressed, ready for their departure.

"Who drives today?" asked Lily, as they were finishing their breakfast.

"Ethel," replied Marjorie, without a moment's hesitation.

"Then, Ethel," remarked Lily, "you have to go out and get the car and bring it around to us!"

"And be sure to have plenty of gas!" cautioned Florence.

"And don't forget oil!" added someone.

"And water!" put in another.

Ethel raised her hands to her ears.

"That's enough advice, please! Somebody get my bag, and I'll meet you all there at the side steps."

"Don't forget the car!" teased Florence, provokingly.

The remark was only a jest, uttered with the hope of getting a rise out of Ethel; therefore none of the scouts was surprised to see her appear, two

or three minutes later, without the car. It was so like Ethel to return tit for tat, and to keep them waiting, for punishment.

"Ethel, please don't waste time," remonstrated Mrs. Hart, nervous to be off.

"Yes—hurry!" cried Florence, in a tone of command.

But Ethel only stood still and shook her head.

"I can't get the car," she said, sadly; "because the car is gone!"

Marjorie looked up sharply; surely it was unlike Ethel to carry a joke so far.

"You're teasing us!" she said.

But the look on Ethel's serious face assured the girls that she was not jesting.

"It's the honest truth, girls," she declared; "it's gone, and neither the proprietor nor the garage-man knows a thing about it."

With the exception of Marjorie, the girls grew hysterical as the meaning of the whole situation dawned upon them. Unsatisfied with Ethel's scant report, they rushed to the garage to make inquiry for themselves.

"It's a fact," said the man, in answer to their numerous questions, most of which were put to him at the same time. "And we haven't a sign of a clue!"

"But how did the thief get in?" demanded Mar-

jorie. "If you have the only key? Was either lock broken?"

"No, ma'am."

Marjorie looked at him keenly; it was impossible to accuse him of the theft. And yet how else could the car have left the garage? She felt baffled, defeated; here was another mystery which looked as if it never would be solved!

"So the whole trip is off!" wailed Daisy, bursting into tears as they returned to the hotel. "And you girls have all lost your rewards—just on our account!"

"No, no, don't feel badly, "Daisy," said Lily, putting her arm around the other girl's shoulder. "We're not blaming you—"

By the time they had reached the hotel, the news had spread, and guests and clerks alike came forward with all sorts of offers of help. But somehow they felt at last as if there were nothing to do.

"Did you carry insurance?" asked Mrs. Hart of Marjorie.

"Oh, yes," replied the latter, "but not nearly enough to cover the cost of a new car. Besides, it takes a good while to get the money; and even if we borrowed it, we'd never secure a new car in time to make the trip on schedule." She paused a second, evidently making a mighty effort to control

herself. "We—we—will have to use the rest of our money to go back by rail."

"You certainly have had hard luck!" commented the older woman, sympathetically. "I'm awfully sorry."

"The fates were against us!" sighed Florence, wearily.

"Let's—let's go to our rooms again!" whispered Daisy. "I just can't help crying—"

"All right—we'll go have a good cry!" assented Lily. "Maybe that will help."

Laughing and weeping at the same time, the scouts made their way to the second floor, to discuss their plight in view of their most advisable move.

"Anyway, we don't have to drive across the desert," remarked Marjorie.

"But what shall we do?" asked Florence.

"Go home, of course," said Ethel.

"I'm not so sure of that," put in Marjorie, who was slowly regaining her courage. "That may not be practical. In the first place, it might be difficult to secure good accommodations from here back to the east; and in the second place, I'd like to see our friends again."

"What friends?" demanded Florence.

"Aunt Emeline and the Crowells. I'm simply not content to let the matter drop—I mean about

all those misfortunes which we met with on the way out. Why, even those two officers thought it was unusual."

"I wonder," mused Lily, "whether we ever would have found out, if this hadn't happened. It hardly seems possible—"

"It wouldn't have seemed possible on the way out if we hadn't known that it was a fact," Marjorie reminded her. "Imagine having one's clothing stolen!"

"But how do you think you can find out anything now?" inquired Daisy.

"I don't know—only by some sort of detective work, like we managed last summer. Now my plan is this: to wait here until Jack and John turn up later in the day, consult them, and ask them to help us. What do you all think?"

Daisy suddenly heaved a great sigh; she was weary of the whole proceeding.

"I'm going home!" she announced. "Before we get into any more trouble. Who will go with me?"

"I will!" volunteered Florence, immediately. "I don't want to go back and paw around that old lady as if to beg her for a car. I guess we can get accommodations on some train."

"I'm with you, Flos and Daisy," declared Ethel, briefly.

"But won't anybody help me?" begged Marjorie.
"Aren't you a bit curious?"

"I'll stick with you, Marj!" said Lily. "At least until the boys come and we get their advice."

"Oh, thank you, Lily!" exclaimed Marjorie, impulsively hugging her chum. "Now we will find out something!"

"If there's anything to be found out!" remarked Florence, cynically.

The others lost no time in consulting time-tables, and phoning about reservations, and found, to their joy, that they could leave at noon on a train for Chicago. Marjorie and Lily looked rather wistful as the locomotive pulled out of the station, leaving them all alone, save for Mrs. Hart, in this strange town. They had been secretly hoping all morning that the boys would arrive before the others left; now, as they turned their faces back toward the hotel it was their one thought. But the clerk's answer to their inquiry was just the same as before: no one had called for them.

"Can you imagine what could have happened to them?" asked Marjorie. "I thought I caught a glimpse of them over at that hotel across the street, about supper time last night. Surely they wouldn't start without us."

"And they must have heard about the stolen car,"

added Lily. "The police are investigating it already."

The girls returned listlessly to Mrs. Hart's room and found her engaged in the process of packing. She looked up gloomily at their entrance, and informed them that she was returning to San Francisco on the morrow.

"And so," she concluded, "if you two young ladies want a chaperone, you will have to go too."

"I guess it's the only thing to do," admitted Marjorie, regretfully. "So we might as well pack our things, Lily."

In her speech and her thought Marjorie Wilkinson was as near to acknowledgement of defeat as she had ever been in her life.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL SET.

AFTER the girls left the restaurant on the eve of their return trip, John and Jack went back to their table and smoked a while in silence. Both had been surprised by the boldness of Marjorie's plan; yet both attached importance to the fact that she had considered it necessary to summon them from Chicago for assistance. And each young man secretly entertained a feeling of pride at her dependence.

"Well, what do you think there is to it?" asked Jack.

"Something, of course," replied John. "Marjorie never goes off at a tangent."

"I'd like to meet these Crowell fellows," observed the other.

"Well, we did meet those two chaps at Mae's—and you know I didn't think much of them. I have to admit I've been sort of worried all summer, though I hardly expected anything like this."

"You agree with Marj that they'll try something again?"

"I do—and I don't," replied John, thoughtfully. "If they're as scheming as your sister believes them to be, they'll see that she is on. Yet, as she says, they'd hate to kiss all that money goodbye."

"You bet!" agreed Jack. "But I can't conceive that they would try to pull off anything serious, as Marj seems to think probable. Two young fellows of their type would have more sense."

"No, neither can I—if they try to work the stunt themselves. The thing that worries me is that they might hire some one else to do their dirty work for them—a couple of desperate characters, for instance, who wouldn't know where to stop."

"That's so!" frowned Jack. "Gee! I'm glad we're here! We'll have to be on the job all the time, and never let them get out of our sight. The first thing we want to do is to get a car—not a flivver, but a good, fast car—that will keep up with theirs."

"I guess we could hire a car of that description," nodded John.

"But where? No one out here knows who we are, and people don't hire out good cars to perfect strangers, you know."

"That's true," acknowledged John, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Suddenly he struck the table with his fist. "I have it! My firm has a branch office in this city, and the fellow who is manager learned his job in the same office with me. We were

great chums. I'll call Ted Fisher on the phone, and he'll be able to help us out."

"Good!" exclaimed Jack. "Let's clear out of here and get a move on."

They called for their bill, and then made for the nearest phone. The friend was located without difficulty in the telephone directory, and a moment later John was in a booth holding an animated conversation. Jack, who was waiting outside, saw John hang up and come out smiling.

"Ted's going to look after us!" he announced, gleefully. "He even says he thinks he can get us a car just like the girls! so that, barring accidents, they'll not be able to travel faster than we can. We're to wait here for Ted; he'll be along in ten minutes."

"I was just thinking while you were in there phoning," mused Jack. "Suppose we are able to hire a car, and trail the girls all the way to Lima without anything happening. Who is going to drive the car back?"

"That would be a jolt, now wouldn't it?" considered John, thoughtfully. "But why worry about that now? We'll take a tip from General Grant, and cross that bridge when we come to it!"

"What's General Grant got to do with it?" said Jack mournfully. "He won't be in Lima to drive the car back."

John threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"I had in mind that story of how, when someone asked him what retreat he had provided for in case a certain offensive failed, he said 'We're not going to retreat!' If nothing happens, I guess we can get in touch with the owner of the car and have him send on some reliable person to drive it back. But why worry? It is my opinion, that if those fellows are going to interfere, they'll do it before they get too far from home; for why should they be any more anxious than we are to take such a long drive. Their absence might cause suspicion."

Here John turned to greet a tall young man who was advancing upon him with outstretched hand.

"Hello, Ted!"

"Hadley, old man, you're the last person in the world I expected to see out here! How come?"

"It's a long story," replied John, introducing him to Jack.

"Jack Wilkinson, did you say?" exclaimed Ted Fisher, shaking Jack's hand. "Why, I remember that name well. You were John's side-partner in several other enterprises. Now, what are you two up to? I hope you'll surrender yourselves to my tender mercies for this evening, at least."

"We're yours for this evening, Ted, with pleasure," acquiesced John. "And we are depending on you to get that car for us."

"Yes, I think I can do that. Let's go; I have my own outside."

When they were in the car, he asked:

"Do you mind telling what you want the car for, or is it a secret?"

John looked at Jack, who nodded his head approvingly; and they proceeded to outline their plans, without divulging any names.

"Some adventure!" remarked John's friend. "I wish I could go with you myself!"

They stopped before a public garage and entered the office where a man sat working at a roll-top desk. He rose respectfully when he recognized their companion.

"Good evening, Captain. What can I do for you?"

"Tom, here are two very good friends of mine, Mr. Hadley and Mr. Wilkinson. They must have a car for a week or so. And Tom, Mr. Hadley is a cracker-jack automobile man, and I know for a fact that he would take better care of a machine than I would; so I want you to let him have the one I used while mine was being overhauled. I'll guarantee that it will come back to you in as good shape as when it leaves."

"When do you want it? I had it out the other night and picked up a phonograph needle in the rear tire."

"Tomorrow morning, at six o'clock. And the puncture won't matter, Tom. I want you to put on four brand-new tires, of the best make in your shop. And you'd better put a new spare on the back. Charge 'em to me. And as a special favor, I want you personally to give the engine a thorough looking over, and see that she has all the oil and gas she'll carry. By six A. M., Tom."

"She'll be ready. We'll start to work right away. Shall we take a look at her?"

They stepped out into the garage, where Tom called to two mechanics who were working on an expensive limousine.

"Come on, you guys. Put that prairie schooner on the shelf for a while."

"Mr. Hughes is coming for this tomorrow morning," observed one of the men, hesitating.

"I know. Let Mr. Hughes wait! This is a special job for Mr. Fisher."

They followed the foreman over to the far corner of the garage where two big low touring cars with streamline bodies stood side by side.

"What's this, Tom, what's this? Which is our car?" asked Fisher.

The two machines were identical. Except for the fact that one showed signs of having been on the road lately, while the other was clean and bright

with a new set of tires, it would have been hard to tell them apart.

"Twins, by Jove!" exclaimed Jack.

John, when he beheld the newer car, started violently and stared in silence.

The foreman, Tom, was chuckling to himself.

"Sister ships, I call 'em. Funny thing; here you come, asking me to put our car in A1 condition, with a new set of tires, by six o'clock tomorrow. We've just finished doing the same thing to this one for a party of Girl Scouts. They're comin' for her at eight o'clock tomorrow; they motored here all the way from Philadelphia, and they're startin' back tomorrow. Some girls!"

All three young men exchanged amused glances during this recital. It was evident that the girls' performance had gained the man's admiration.

"The car looks fine after coming all that distance," remarked John, carelessly. "They must have taken good care of it. Is it in good shape for the return?"

"Fine! These are some cars! I asked the young lady who seemed to be the leader of the crowd how they came to pick out this particular make, and she said a friend of hers who knew cars picked it out. I'll say he knew something. Well, I got to get to work if you gentlemen are to have this boat by six o'clock."

When they reached the street, Jack exclaimed, "Talk about luck! You'd better hold on to me, Hadley, or I'll be doing a war-dance right here on the pavement!"

"Ted, you wonderful fellow!" cried John. "When I called on you for help I had an idea it would be a good deal like rubbing a magical lamp, but you're a far more powerful genie than I ever dreamed. What's the secret of your hold on that man Tom?"

Ted Fisher looked pleased at the obvious appreciation of the two friends. Yet he hesitated before he answered:

"Maybe I never told you I was captain of a dough-boy outfit in France during the war. Tom was one of my sergeants. Well,—one night I helped him get out of a tight place; so I'm sort of special pet of his. That's all. Tom's the best automobile mechanic I know of. He said you could have the car by six o'clock; so you can depend on him. Now forget it. You said you were mine for the evening, you know."

And he motioned them into the waiting car.

CHAPTER XXI.

PURSUIT.

THE next morning John and Jack were stirring as soon as the first gray light of dawn filtered through their bedroom windows.

"Let's get up," suggested John. "No use trying to sleep any more. I'm going to take a cold shower —no telling when I'll get another."

By five o'clock they were dressed and had packed their handbags, and were ready to leave the hotel.

"We'll go out somewhere and get a good substantial breakfast, and go around to the garage for the car."

They strolled around until they found a restaurant whose sign announced that it was open day and night. When they were seated opposite each other Jack addressed his companion across the porcelain table-top:

"Tell me what you think of this. They told us at the garage last night that the girls weren't coming for their car until eight o'clock. If we go for ours at six, we'll have two hours to fool around before they come, and two hours of waiting will seem

like ten. Let's get our car, drive a little piece down the street, and wait there until we see what girl comes for the car. If it's Marjorie or Ethel, we can show ourselves, find out how things are going, and make sure there has been no change of plans."

"Fine!" agreed John. "And if it's Marjorie who comes for the car, we can show her ours. She'll be glad to know we have been so lucky."

"Great! And won't her eyes pop out when she sees it! She'll think we have hers. I'll have a little fun with her."

"If you can be separated from those hot-cakes, let's be going. We want to be at the garage just at six o'clock, and show that man Tom we were in earnest."

As the last piece of syrupy hot-cake disappeared from his plate, Jack looked up in horror.

"Say! We forgot something!"

"What?"

"Suppose the garage burned down last night and our cars were destroyed!"

"Of all the fool notions," laughed John, "you certainly can think up the darndest!"

"What would General Grant have said in a case like that?"

"Quit your kidding, you idiot, and come on!"

At the garage they found the foreman and his two men cleaning up.

"Just got finished, gentlemen. She's all ready, and it yet wants five minutes till six," he called, glancing up at the shop clock.

"Great work!" commanded John. "Ted Fisher said you wouldn't fail us!" And by the expression on the man's face, John knew that he could not have said anything that would have pleased him more.

The boys drove down the street for a short distance to the block below, turned around, and parked along the curb in a position to command a view of the garage. They whiled away the time in admiring their own car, and, when they had tired of that, in watching the people hurrying along to their day's work. When it approached eight o'clock, they began to feel restless. Jack was pulling out his watch every other minute, until John begged him to let it alone. Then, at ten minutes before the hour they saw turning the corner of the street, not only Marjorie, but Ethel as well. John started the car and overtook them before they could reach the garage.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Marjorie, when she became aware of their presence, "am I in my right senses? Have you two been stalking us?"

"Not quite," replied John. "We just thought we'd let you know we are ready and on the job!"

But to Jack's chagrin, his sister was so glad to see them that she failed to notice the car they were

seated in. Not so Ethel, however. She noticed it immediately, and cried out:

"How in the world did you get hold of our car?"

Jack's face brightened perceptibly.

"Is this your car?" he asked, innocently.

"It certainly is!" exclaimed Marjorie indignantly, stepping back to look it over.

"Why, the man did say it belonged to some girls, now that I think of it!" exclaimed Jack. "But he said they wouldn't need it for a few weeks!"

"What man?" demanded Marjorie, her eyes flashing.

"In the garage there," replied Jack.

"The villain!" cried the enraged girl, starting off immediately for the garage.

"Hold on a minute, Sis!"

Marjorie turned and saw them laughing at her. She stood frowning at them a moment, and came back again.

"I should know my own brother by this time. What trick are you trying to play on us?"

"Did you think that after they made your car, they broke the mold?" asked Jack.

"Why, is this another one just like ours?" cried Marjorie, delighted.

"What else?" answered John; and he proceeded to explain their good fortune in obtaining the car.

"It's wonderful! Marvelous! I hope we're as lucky with the rest of the trip. We must hurry along now, or the girls will wonder what is detaining us."

"No change in plans?"

"No change! Don't lose us!"

"Never fear! We'll be with you at the finish. Goodbye, and good luck!"

They waited where they were until they saw the girls leave the garage in their car, and then followed at a distance. The journey had begun. All that day the boys continued to follow, stopping when the girls stopped, but always keeping far enough in the rear to avoid attracting attention. So long as they could just see the leading car, or a cloud of dust before them, they were satisfied that they could overtake it quickly, if necessary. At regular intervals they changed places at the wheel in order to prevent fatigue. Jack was in a high humor; for he was an exceptionally good driver, and to be at the steering-wheel of a good car spelled heaven for him. He was immensely pleased at the steady pace the girls were setting; they seemed to be fairly eating up the miles. John sat grim and silent most of the time, with that look of determination his face always wore when embarked on some serious enterprise.

Nothing happened during the day to arouse their

suspicions. They went steadily on, overtaking and passing other cars at times, but never being passed themselves. Late in the afternoon they entered one of the larger towns on their route where the party had planned to spend the night. They were careful not to drive past the hotel where the scouts had engaged rooms, but sought instead a smaller place nearby, put up their car for the night, and had dinner. They went to bed early, reasoning that the girls would do so after their long drive.

As on the day previous they were up the next morning at dawn, breakfasted and waited around until they saw the girls start, then took up the trail once more. As the day wore on, and nothing happened to break the monotony of the drive, Jack began to grow impatient and remarked that the enemy had gotten cold feet. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than both became aware of the fact that they were rapidly overtaking the car in front, although they had not increased their speed. Then they saw that the girls had stopped.

"Here's where we come in at last!" cried Jack, who happened to be driving.

A sudden burst of speed brought them close to the girls in a minute's time, and as Jack slowed down to get his bearings, they saw two horsemen searching the scout car. Then John suddenly remembered that Ted Fisher had told them that their

car would probably be searched for liquor at the Nevada state line if they used this road

"A booze search!" he hastily reminded Jack. "They're all right; but we're too close now not to be discovered. Pass them at full speed, or we'll be stopped ourselves!"

They whizzed by the group before the men were aware of their existence.

"Gave them the go-by!" cried Jack, exultantly, as he slowed down again.

"But I'm afraid the girls recognized us!" said John.

"What's the difference? I'm glad we escaped being held up for a search; but now we've gone and reversed the order of things, and we have to lead instead of follow."

Now that they thought the girls knew of their presence, they did not trouble to keep out of sight, realizing that so long as they acted as strangers, Mrs. Hart would suspect nothing. When they reached the town on the border of the desert, they searched for the hotel given in the girls' schedule, and engaged rooms for themselves in another across the street. They did not wait to put the car away, but left it standing in the hotel yard; for they were anxious to be out of sight when the girls arrived. From a window overlooking the street, they saw the scouts alight, with the exception of Marjorie,

who drove the car into the garage adjoining their hotel. When she reappeared they were tempted to go out and intercept her, but thought better of it.

"Let's go to the dining-room," suggested Jack, "I'm hungry as a bear!"

"You always are!" answered his companion.

They chose a table by a window from which they could see the hotel opposite, hoping to catch sight of the girls again. A long while after dinner they sat there, resting and smoking. They saw the garage-man lock up his place and go off to supper; after that, except for an occasional horseman, the street was deserted. The long drive and the hearty meal made both boys feel drowsy. Jack was about to suggest that they go out to hunt a garage, when John leaped to his feet, upsetting the water carafe. Grasping Jack's arm he pointed across the street to the garage. Jack looked, and to his amazement beheld the girls' car standing outside the closed doors.

"What the deuce!" he muttered. "Can it be that they are going on again tonight?"

"It's not on the schedule," said John.

"Shall we investigate?"

"No! Sit still! I think the play is about to commence! Let's wait for our cues!"

At this announcement, the film of sleepiness cleared instantly from Jack's brain.

"Look!"

The door of the garage office opened slowly. Suddenly a young man came out, his cap pulled down over his eyes. Closing the door after him, he took one hasty glance up and down the street, jumped into the girls' machine and drove off.

Without one word, the two boys dashed for their own car. They found it as they had left it.

"You drive!" cried John.

They sprang to their places, Jack at the wheel, John in the seat beside him.

"Good thing we had the old boat handy!"

"You bet!" replied Jack, guiding the car out into the road.

"Jackie, my boy, I always did admire your driving. Now's your chance to show what you really can do."

"Watch me! I'll get 'im," came the confident answer.

Already the car was leaping under them, responding under Jack's hands like a live thing, and gathering speed all the time.

Fortunately, the thief had headed for the desert, to which there was but the one road. The boys had but to overtake him; there was no chance of his eluding them by another road. This they both realized, and the thought gave them confidence.

Ahead they could see a cloud of dust which enveloped the fleeing car.

"We're gaining!" said John.

Jack nodded grimly, and put on more speed. They were, indeed, drawing closer; for they could begin to discern the outline of the stolen machine. Slowly, they gained until they could make out a figure at the wheel. Then, as slowly, the figure vanished; and finally the car itself.

"He's pulling away from us!" cried John. "He probably sees us!"

Jack had his eyes rivited on the road ahead; he did not answer, but John could feel their speed increase.

"Go to it, boy!" he yelled, in admiration. "You'll get him yet!"

And after all, why should they not? Their cars were alike, both capable of about the same speed. And the advantage, if there were any, lay with themselves, who had an extra man to ballast the swaying machine. But they would have to overtake him soon, while the daylight lasted, and it could not last much longer.

"It's up to the superior driver!" concluded John; and glancing at the cool, determined figure at the wheel by his side, he felt his anxiety pass away. He took his revolver from his pocket and examined it.

"We're gaining again!" he announced a moment later.

Slowly, inch by inch, it seemed, they were creep-

ing closer to the car ahead. But could they hold to such a pace? The rush of hot wind almost took their breath away; particles of sand beat like needles against their faces and into their eyes, almost blinding them; and the car swayed from side to side like mad, threatening every moment to overturn. Jack, bent double over the steering-wheel, was giving her all she would take, staking all on this last burst of speed, which was so terrific that it seemed as if the earth were turning under them, opening, about to swallow them up.

But it was too much for the other driver, who was travelling as fast as his nerve, skill, and fear permitted him. The boys were gaining rapidly; and when they were about fifty yards apart, John leaned over and yelled in Jack's ear:

"I'm going to shoot over his head, and see whether that will stop him!"

He raised his revolver and fired carefully, but the swaying cars altered his aim, and the ball shattered the windshield of the scouts' car. But this display of hostility had the desired effect. The pursued car immediately began to slow down, and continued to do so until it came to a stop.

"What are you fellows trying to do?" blustered the frightened young man at the wheel, as the boys came to a halt beside him.

"Arrest a very dirty thief!" replied John prompt-

ly, covering him with his revolver. "Hands up! Now, stand up! Jack, just feel in his pockets and see whether he's armed."

Jack drew a small revolver from the man's side-pocket and transferred it to his own.

"Who are you? Highwaymen?"

"We represent private interests," replied Jack, grinning.

"Now tell us your name," said John, "and what you are doing with this car!"

"What's that to you?"

"All right; don't tell us then! But maybe you'll tell the police authorities when we turn you over to them!"

"No, no! Don't do that!" begged the prisoner, thoroughly cowed. "You say you represent private interests. I'll tell you all, if you promise not to lock me up."

John considered a moment.

"Your name is Crowell, isn't it?" he asked.

The other started, but nodded in affirmation.

"Which are you—Milton or Vaughn?"

"Vaughn. How did you know?"

"Never mind that! Just tell us the story!"

"Will you promise not to hand me over, if I do?"

"Can't tell till I hear the story," replied John.

Vaughn Crowell pondered this, then said:

"I guess I'll take a chance!"

The recital was a sorry one, but he told it all. It was dark by the time he had finished. John reached forward and turned on the headlights.

"It's the meanest trick I ever heard of, Crowell! No one with common decency would have thought of such a thing! But I'll tell you what I'll do. If my chum agrees, I'll let you off provided you go with us straight to Miss Vaughn, your aunt, and tell her all you've told us. How about it, Jack?"

"Suits me!"

"I'll do it!" decided Vaughn. "When do we start?"

"Right away," answered John. "But first, please oblige me by stepipng a few paces away while I have speech with my friend here. There, there, that's far enough!"

Turning to Jack, he said in an undertone:

"How does this plan suit you? You take our car and go ahead, and I'll follow with Crowell in the girls' car. I'll make him drive, and I'll see that he doesn't get away with anything!"

"Fine!" agreed Jack. "Triumphal march! For us, at least. But if I were in his shoes, I think I'd rather face jail than that old lady, judging from what I've heard of her."

"So I'm thinking!" laughed John. "And Jack, old man!" he added, placing his hand affectionately upon his chum's shoulder, "you sure are some driver!"

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFessions.

WHEN Mrs. Hart and the two girls returned to Miss Vaughn's palacial home, they found the old lady alone. Her nephews, she explained, had gone off on a camping trip, in Milton's car.

"In what direction did they go?" asked Marjorie, suspiciously.

"I hardly know," replied her hostess. "They didn't leave any address—or tell me when they would be back again. Now tell me all about your own experience."

As briefly as possible the girl related the story of the stolen car, ending with the departure of the other three scouts for the east.

"And Lily and I are going as soon as we can arrange for accommodations," she concluded.

"No! No!" protested Miss Vaughn. "Not without your motor-car, Marjorie! If ever a girl earned one, that girl is you!"

But Marjorie shook her head decidedly.

"Never will I accept one until Daisy's and Flor-

ence's innocence is proved. And there doesn't seem to be any hope of doing that!"

"Why not change your mind, Emeline, and believe the girls?" put in Mrs. Hart. "I know that they are telling the truth!"

"No, we wouldn't accept that!" protested Lily, with spirit. "But I do think Marj might take hers!"

"Well, I won't!" returned the other. "So let's don't talk about it any more."

"Visitors are coming, Emeline," interrupted Mrs. Hart from her place beside the window. "Why—I do believe it's Milton!"

"Milton Crowell?" demanded Marjorie, in surprise.

"Yes—in his car."

"And isn't Vaughn with him?" asked the boys' aunt.

They all looked up expectantly as the young man entered the room. He appeared rather embarrassed at the presence of the girls, but greeted his aunt with his customary kiss.

"Have a nice time?" asked Miss Vaughn.

"Yes—yes—fine," he stammered.

"Where's Vaughn?"

"Why—er—he'll be along some time later, I expect. He went off fishing with a bunch of fellows, and didn't know just how long he'd be gone."

"Aren't you surprised to see the girls again?" questioned his aunt.

"Why—yes, of course. What—er—happened? Not bandits—?"

"Our car was in a garage for the night, and was stolen from there," replied Marjorie, watching the young man narrowly to see what the news would mean to him. But if he was pleased at the idea of keeping all that money for himself and his brother, he did not allow his expression to betray him.

"Really? I'm awfully sorry!" he murmured, with apparent sincerity. "You girls certainly do have hard luck!"

Again Marjorie eyed him suspiciously; was it possible that he and his brother had had a hand in the theft? It seemed scarcely possible that their car could have been stolen at random, by some ordinary thief. And yet, how could these young men have obtained entrance to a locked garage? The thought however, gave her new stimulus for investigation; silently she made a resolve not to be in any hurry to leave Miss Vaughn's.

Mrs. Hart interrupted her musings with an announcement of her intended departure.

"Indeed you aren't going!" insisted Miss Vaughn, heartily. "You're tired out—and need a rest. "Besides," she added, with a twinkle in her eyes, "I kept

your room ready for you. I expected something like this to happen!"

"What?" demanded Marjorie, in surprise. "You didn't expect us to complete our trip, Miss Vaughn?"

"I hardly thought it possible."

"Yes!" stormed Marjorie; "there is something against us—something too big for us to fight against alone!"

Again she noted the uneasiness, the embarrassment of Miss Vaughn's nephew—an attitude so uncharacteristic of either of the young men as to arouse her suspicions afresh.

"Have you seen Mr. McDaniel and Mr. Cryton since we left, Miss Vaughn?" she asked, with apparent carelessness.

"No; but I know that they are in town. They telephoned last night to find out whether I had heard from your girls."

Marjorie closed her lips tightly; this piece of evidence cleared them from implication in the theft.

"But Milton can telephone them and invite them to dinner if you wish," continued Miss Vaughn, anxious to do anything to divert the girls' minds from their misfortune.

"Oh, do!" cried Marjorie, enthusiastically, but for a reason very different from the one Miss Vaughn believed.

Glad of the excuse to escape from the room and from the presence of the two girls whom he so thoroughly disliked, Milton Crowell withdrew to carry out Marjorie's wish. A moment later the whole party separated.

As soon as Marjorie and Lily were alone, the latter began again with her questions.

"You're on the war-path again, Marj!" she exclaimed. "What have you up your sleeve now?"

"Nothing definite, Lil," replied Marjorie, smilingly. "But that Crowell boy acts queerly—and I mean to try to find out more, before I leave!"

"Righto!" agreed Lily, throwing herself upon the bed, for she was exceedingly weary. "But what makes you so anxious to see McDaniel and Cryton?"

"I don't know myself," returned her companion. "Let's take a nap now, Lil; maybe something will be revealed to us in a dream!"

When the girls returned to the porch at six o'clock, they found all three of the young men assembled. Marjorie greeted the new-comers coolly, taking care to question them cleverly as to their whereabouts since the scouts' departure. But both Cryton and McDaniel told, without any hesitation, all they had been doing in San Francisco during the girls' absence. They, in turn, demanded all the details of the girls' trip, which ended in such disaster.

"But where is Vaughn?" asked Cryton, turning to Milton, after the story was finished.

The latter repeated his explanation in the same embarrassed manner.

"He'll be along directly," he concluded, avoiding Marjorie's eyes.

"Maybe this is he now," remarked McDaniel, catching sight of a car that was just about to enter the gate.

"No," replied Milton immediately; "that's a touring-car, and his is a racer."

At these words Marjorie's heart took a wild leap. A touring car! Could it—was it possible that it could belong to the boys?

She did not have long to wait for her hope to be confirmed; a moment later the machine stopped in front of the steps, but, to her consternation, only her brother got out!

"Jack!" cried Marjorie and Lily, both rushing down the steps at the same time. "Oh, where did you come from?"

"Sis!" he exclaimed joyfully, but taking care to hold her at arms' distance. "I'm too dirty to touch —have been driving day and night!"

Almost beside herself with happiness, the girl led her brother up to the porch and presented him to Miss Vaughn. Then she introduced the others, re-

calling the fact of his previous acquaintance with Cryton and McDaniel at Lima.

"This is lovely for Marjorie," beamed Miss Vaughn, glad to see the girl so happy again. "But tell us how you happened to come."

"No," interrupted Marjorie, too impatient to wait; "tell us what happened to John!"

"He'll be along directly," replied Jack, with a twinkle in his eyes. Turning to Miss Vaughn, he added, "And your other nephew is with him."

Marjorie only had time to notice that Milton Crowell's face grew deathly white at this piece of information, and that Miss Vaughn's took on a puzzled expression. Before anyone could ask any questions, another mud-spattered touring-car came up the drive.

"It's—it's our own car!" cried Marjorie, jumping off the porch in her wild haste and excitement.

"And Vaughn at the wheel!" gasped Lily in amazement.

The car pulled up in front of the porch, behind the other, with Marjorie riding on the running-board. It seemed almost as if she wanted to hug her precious possession.

Both girls had jumped immediately to the correct explanation of the robbery, but both waited for the boys to relate the facts. They did not even ask any more questions, but continued to watch John with

admiration as he accompanied Vaughn Crowell up the steps.

"There is a great deal to be explained, Miss Vaughn," he began, after he had been duly presented; "not only by us and your nephews, but—" he glanced significantly at Cryton and McDaniel—"but by these other two young men as well. So, if you will permit, I think the best thing to do would be to go inside, and get it over at once!"

"Certainly," murmured the puzzled Miss Vaughn, rising, and leading the way.

When they were all seated again in the drawing-room, Jack turned to Vaughn Crowell.

"Suppose you tell your story first, Mr. Crowell," he suggested.

The young man acquiesced, sullenly.

"As some of the girls no doubt expected," he began, "Milt and I got our car and followed them back to the east. But they never camped at night, and they never seemed to get far enough away from some other car to let us plan a delay."

"A delay?" interrupted his aunt, sharply. "You actually meant to prevent the girls from making their trip?"

"Yes—we did," admitted the young man.

"But why? Just for a joke?"

"Yes, of course!" put in Milton, hastily, grasping at the suggestion. "We thought it would be fun to

give them a scare in some way. They were so cock-sure of themselves—”

“Pardon me!” interrupted John, in a tone of disgust, “but there is not a word of truth in that statement. We caught your brother and forced a confession from him, his alternative being that we would hand him over to the police for stealing the girls’ car! So please allow him to go on with his story.”

“But your motive?” persisted the old lady.

“The money, of course!” John explained.

“Well,” continued Vaughn, more sheepishly than ever, “we hit upon the plan of entering the garage where the scout car was stored, and watching our opportunity to take it. We had no difficulty in accomplishing this.”

“But the garage was locked!” objected Marjorie; “and the bolt was found unbroken!”

Crowell smiled grimly; even now he considered it a clever trick.

“Milt drove into the garage in our car,” he explained, “with me hidden in the space in the back where we carry tools and baggage. He parked the car there for an hour, and went away; meanwhile, I watched my chance, slipped out of our car, and stored myself away in yours. When Milt came back and drove off, the garage-man suspected nothing. I managed my get-away while the garage was locked, and the man at supper.”

"But how did you bolt the door—from the outside?" inquired Lily.

"Easy! I left the office dead-latch off, went back after the car was out, and let myself out through the office. Nobody was around, so I got away without suspicion."

"And we never discovered our loss until the next morning!" murmured Marjorie, regretfully.

"No, because I left no clues. The garage-man found the garage as he left it; why should he suspect anything?"

"And how were you caught?" flashed Marjorie.

"You tell it, John," suggested Jack, modestly.

"There's not much to tell," replied John; "only that we recognized the girls' car, and gave it a chase."

"And caught it!" added Marjorie, triumphantly.

To everyone the story seemed almost incredible in its exposure of the Crowells' villainy; but to Miss Vaughn each word was like a blow. Her face grew ashen, and her expression distorted. For some moments she was so angry that she could not speak.

Finally Jack broke the silence.

"That isn't half of it," he said. "We succeeded in learning all you wanted explained about your trip out, Marj," he added, turning to his sister.

Marjorie's eyes flashed expectantly; she glanced across the room at McDaniel and Cryton, but found them looking fixedly at the floor.

"Proceed!" commanded Jack again, to the culprit.

"The whole thing started, as near as I can remember, about two months ago," said Vaughn, doggedly, "at a frat smoker. The fellows were all talking about a new frat house, and nobody could see any way of getting the money together. Then Milt and I hit on the plan of approaching Auntie on the subject. And do you remember, Aunt Emeline, that you turned us down on the grounds that this scout trip would eat too heavily into your income?"

"Yes, I recall the circumstance," nodded Miss Vaughn, with an effort.

"Then Milt and I suggested that if the trip fell through, or the girls failed to earn their cars, that we should get the money. And you agreed."

Again the old lady nodded, coldly.

"So the idea must have come to one of us to make that trip fail, and we let McDaniel and Cryton into the scheme, got all our details from Auntie, and proceeded to do everything in our power to keep the girls from winning."

"But we won in the end!" retorted Marjorie, defiantly. "At least, we would have, if you hadn't lied!"

"And just what was this plan of action?" asked Miss Vaughn, turning not to her nephews, but to McDaniel instead.

"What we wanted to do," explained the latter, "was to delay the girls so they wouldn't get here on time, or else in some way to trick them into accepting assistance from us. In other words, we meant to accomplish our plan without doing any harm to the girls, if possible."

"That was kind of you," remarked Lily, sarcastically.

"So we scattered the tacks that made the punctures, obtained an invitation for ourselves from Tom Melville at Lima and put forth every effort to make ourselves so interesting that you girls would forget all about time and stay over."

"You tried to work that little stunt in Chicago, too, didn't you?" asked Marjorie, shrewdly. "And when you sent us out on that muddy road, you weren't surprised when we got stuck, were you?"

"No," answered Cryton; "the thing that surprised us was your persistence. Would you believe it, Miss Vaughn, these girls not only turned us down, but a farmer with horses as well! Just because he was a man!"

"Then," inquired the hostess, "it is true that the girls never accepted help from a man—all the way out?"

"It's absolutely true!" cried McDaniel. "Those other two fellows were bribed to lie!"

Miss Vaughn now looked utterly disgusted; in-

deed, it seemed as if she hardly cared to hear the remainder of the story. Nevertheless, McDaniel continued.

"Let's see," he mused; "what was it we did next?"

"Stole our food, wasn't it?" prompted Marjorie. "So we had to lose all that time getting more! And then made up a story about being at a smoker that evening!"

"Yes, I guess that was our next offense," admitted the young man.

"And stole our uniforms at Salt Lake City—and later Lily's car!"

"Yes, yes—we're guilty!"

"But how about the robbery?" asked Lily. "Surely you didn't disguise yourselves as bandits, and hold us up for our money and jewelry?"

"Yes, even that!"

"What did you do with the money?" asked Miss Vaughn, with a sudden return of interest.

"It's all here in an envelope," replied McDaniel, reaching in his pocket and handing it to Marjorie. "Will you see that it gets back to its owners?"

"And where is my car?" demanded Lily, sharply.

"Stored in a friend's garage, along the road. I'll ship that east to you soon. And your uniforms have already gone parcel-post to Daisy's house."

"One more thing," persisted Marjorie; "did you

have anything to do with that woman and child whom we took back across the desert?"

"Yes, to that too," replied McDaniel. "We bribed her, so that she would beg you to take her. If she got you half way, she was to receive fifty dollars; if she succeeded in making you take her all the way across, she was to get a hundred."

"And she succeeded all right," concluded Marjorie. "For I saw her get her money."

Miss Vaughn rose suddenly; she had listened to enough.

"Stop!" she commanded. "I am simply astounded at your audacity—all four of you boys. I am worse than ashamed of you! Needless to say, I do not wish you to remain to dinner. In fact," she concluded, addressing her nephews, "you may pack your things and go over to your club. Don't come back until I send for you!"

Then, changing her tone, she issued a cordial invitation to Jack and John to remain.

"Tell me one thing before you go to your rooms," she said: "how did you two young men happen to come from the east to track my nephews and their friends?"

"Marjorie sent for us!" replied John Hadley, proudly. "She suspected something—and wanted proof!"

"Good! Splendid!" exclaimed Miss Vaughn; and

after all the young men had withdrawn, she seemed quite herself again as she chatted cheerfully with the girls until the summons to dinner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE dinner party that evening was the most pleasant occasion of both of the scouts' visits at Miss Vaughn's home; now all the disturbing elements, all the distasteful companions, were removed; the girls felt at last that they were among friends. The boys' aunt seemed to forget her own nephews and their disgraceful deeds and entered whole-heartedly into the joy of the event. Jack's and John's heroism had restored the good name of Pansy Troop; once more the scouts, freed from suspicion of dishonor, had been able to establish the truth.

"Aren't you glad that you accepted Miss Vaughn's invitation to stay?" asked Marjorie of Mrs. Hart, when the little party of six were seated at the table.

"Indeed I am!" replied the older woman, admiringly, for Marjorie was radiant with her triumph. "But you mustn't forget that I believed in you girls all along!"

"And you would have believed in our boys, too, if you had known them!" returned the girl, proudly.

"Marj," interrupted Jack, anxious to turn the topic away from himself and John, and their part in the adventure, "let's try to wire the train the girls are on, and break the good news to them!"

"Great!" exclaimed his sister, forgetting to eat in her excitement.

"But wait and eat your dinner first," advised Miss Vaughn, smilingly.

"And tell them to go to Lima," put in Lily.

"And telegraph Mae, too!" added Marjorie.

"May we go with you, to join in the rejoicing?" asked John, humbly. "Our vacations aren't over till Sunday a week."

"I should say you may!" cried both girls at once.

"I wish I could go with you," mused Miss Vaughn, "and have the satisfaction of seeing Daisy's face when she learns that her innocence is proved!"

"Why not go?" demanded Marjorie, rapturously. "Oh, Miss Vaughn, it will be wonderful!"

"And you, too, Mrs. Hart!" begged Lily. "So that Miss Vaughn will have a companion on the way back!"

Their hostess listened to the girl's entreaties with a pleasant sensation of anticipation; after all, why should she not go? It would afford her a new interest in life at a time when she sadly needed one

after the disgrace of her nephews' conduct. Moreover, such a trip would show the young men that she meant what she said; that before she would take them back they must prove themselves sincere in a genuine reform.

"I believe that I will go," she announced; "at least, if Mrs. Hart will accompany me."

"Yes, I'd like to," answered the other; "as long as we're going by train. Besides, you girls ought to have a chaperone, since Mrs. Remington has gone home."

"Oh, we mustn't forget to wire her—and Alice!" cried Marjorie. "Now our party will be complete."

While Jack went to the telegraph office to send off his messages to the others, Miss Vaughn made the arrangements with the railroad to secure a private car for the party on one of the best trains to the east. Mrs. Hart retired early, and Majorie and Lily and John were left alone, to go over and over each detail of the perilous journey and the boys' thrilling rescue.

Nor was their enjoyment limited to one evening; for, so congenial was the party and so luxurious the accommodations, that every minute of the trip seemed wonderful. John admitted at the end that it was the happiest occasion of his life, and Marjorie looked scarcely less pleased. Indeed, it seemed to more than one member of the party that their arrival at Lima came all too soon.

They found all of the original members already at Mae's, and, while Mrs. Hart and Miss Vaughn were resting at their hotel, Marjorie and Lily, assisted by Jack and John, answered all the questions that were thrust at them in rapid succession.

The dinner was planned for seven o'clock; but Miss Vaughn and Mrs. Hart were late. When they finally came, the former blamed her delay upon an envelope of papers which she held in her hand.

"Your checks, girls!" she announced, smilingly. "With my apologies for my former mistrust."

She began to hand them around to the scouts, evidently taking great delight in having them accepted so joyfully.

"And if you will accept it," she said, turning to Mrs. Remington, "I have one here for you!"

"Thank you!" replied the captain, graciously. "I shall be delighted."

The ceremony was apparently over; yet Miss Vaughn still held one check in her hand. The girls waited, expectantly; something else was undoubtedly to come.

"I can't make a speech, girls," she said, "to tell you of my immense admiration for you, your captain, and your lieutenant—and your loyal friends; so I want to express it in another way. I have here, in the name of Pansy Troop, a check for the Girl

Scout organization. Will Mrs. Remington please take charge of it?"

Trembling, the captain crossed the room and held out her hand. No one voiced the question; yet it seemed as if the air were filled with inquiry regarding the amount, so dear to the heart of every scout was the organization itself. For one second she hesitated; but a glance at Miss Vaughn assured her of her approval.

"TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS TO THE CAMP FUND," she read; "as a tribute to the bravery and integrity of Pansy Troop!"

THE END.

